ION MUD

AMAURY BÜNDGEN

casterman

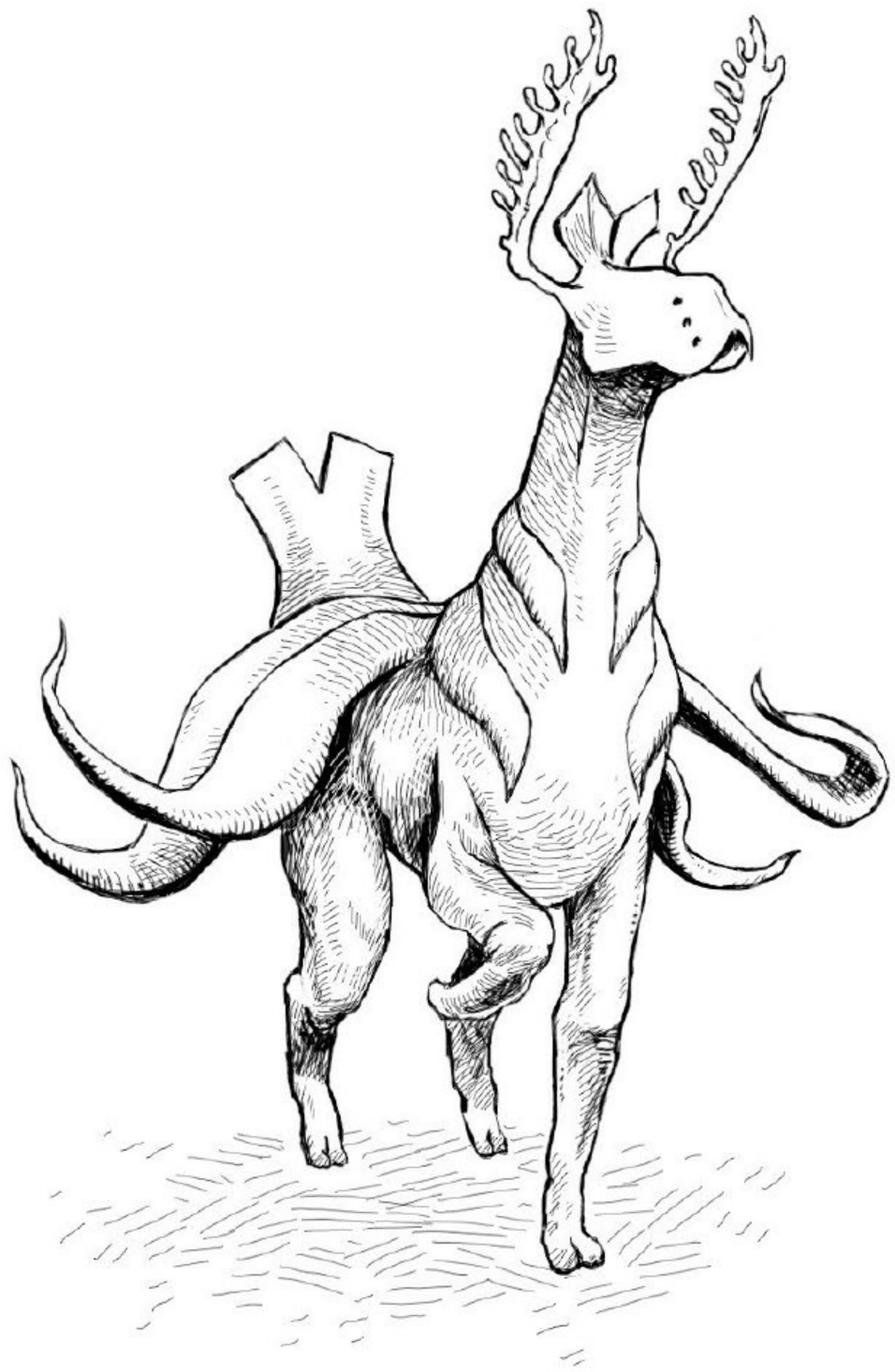
To my dear, sweet wife for her endless support and patience, in this project as well as every previous one. To Vincent, for believing in me from the beginning. To my children, my family, my friends, for their encouragement. To you, my dear reader holding this album in your excited hands: will we see each other later at a signing? And finally to the giants who opened the path and who made me want to follow in their footsteps: it's a bit of a strain on the muscles, but it's worth it.

To all of you, a huge thank you.

Amaury Bündgen

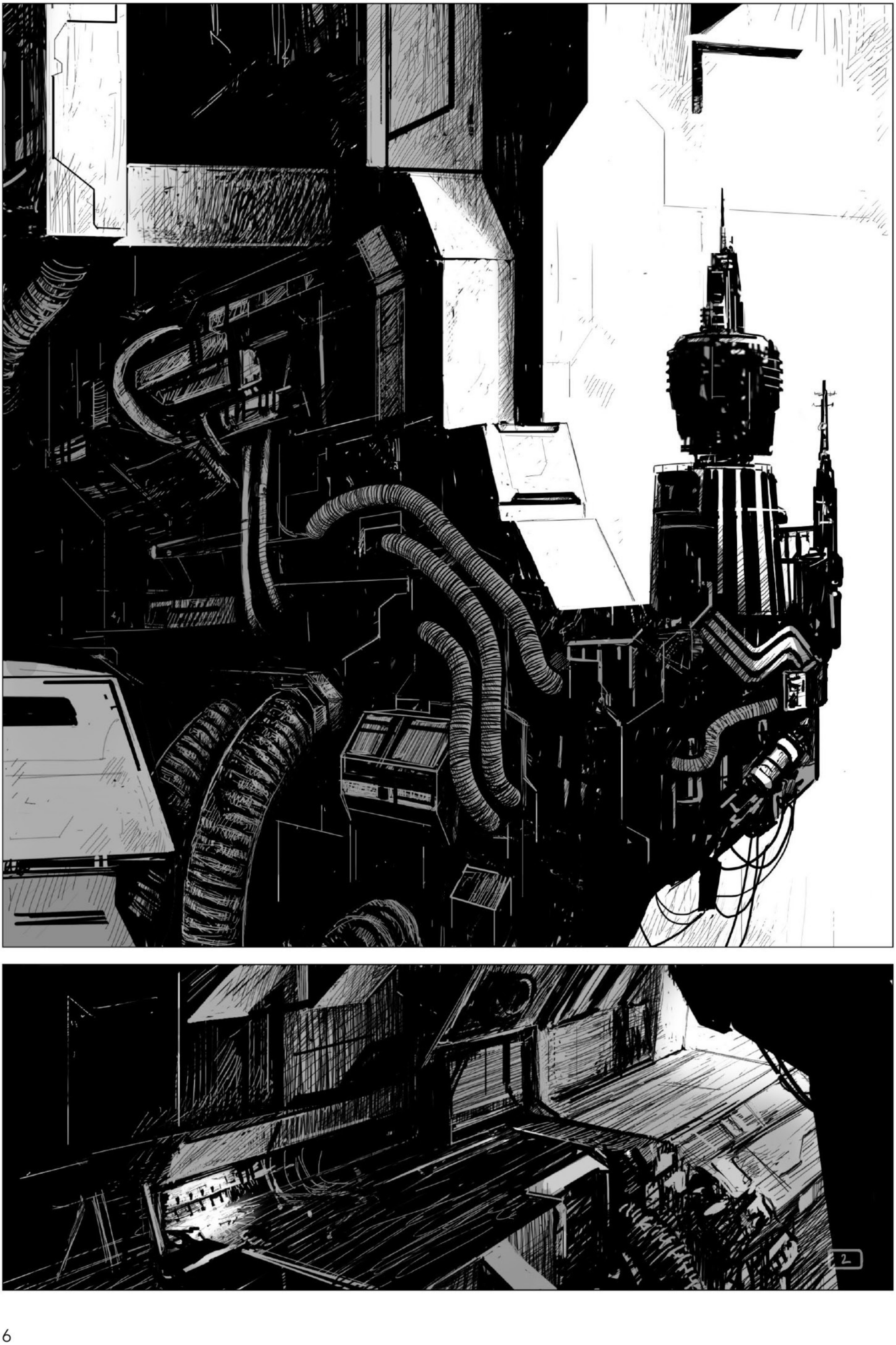
AMAURY BÜNDGEN

ION MUD



TRANSLATION AND TYPESETTING
phillywilly

casterman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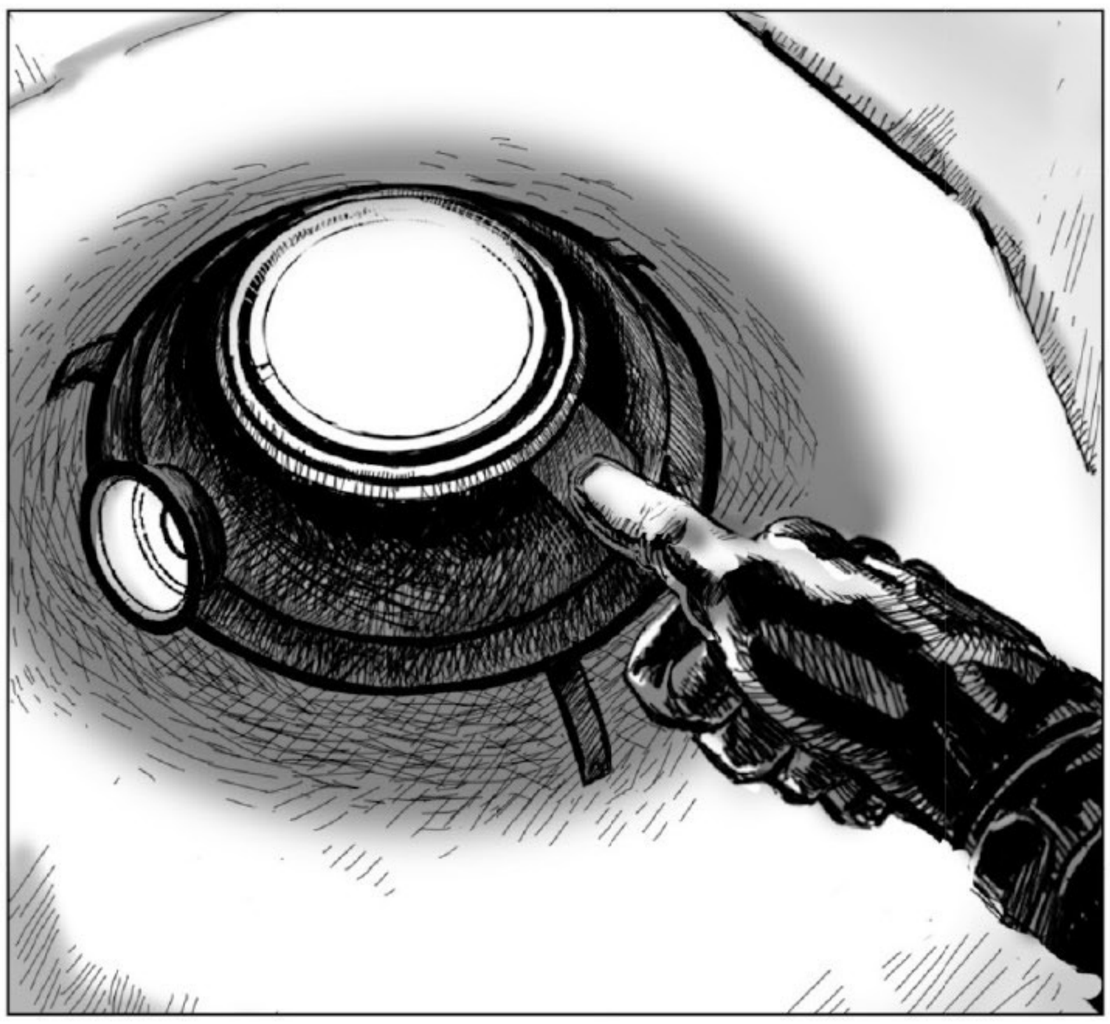

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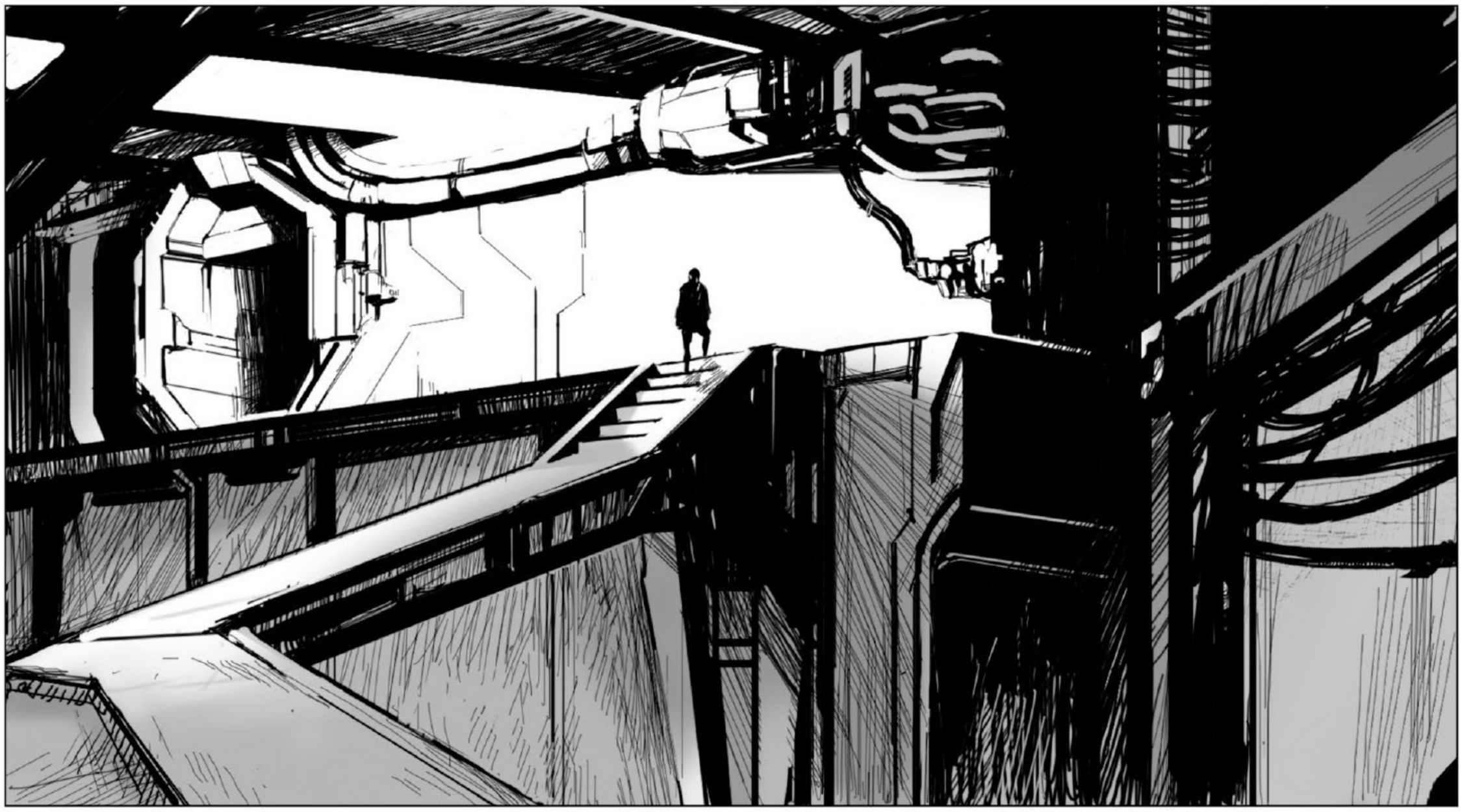
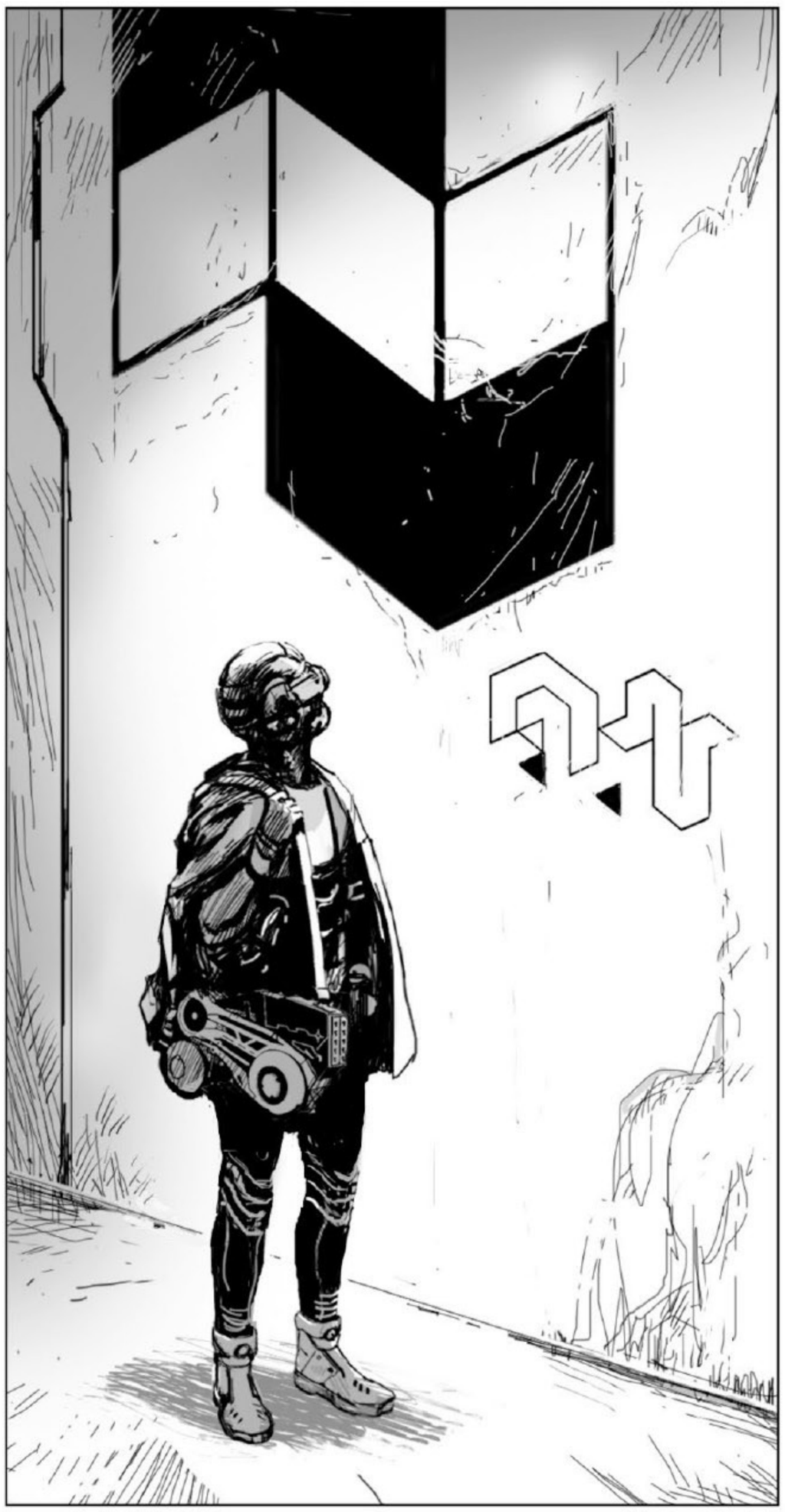
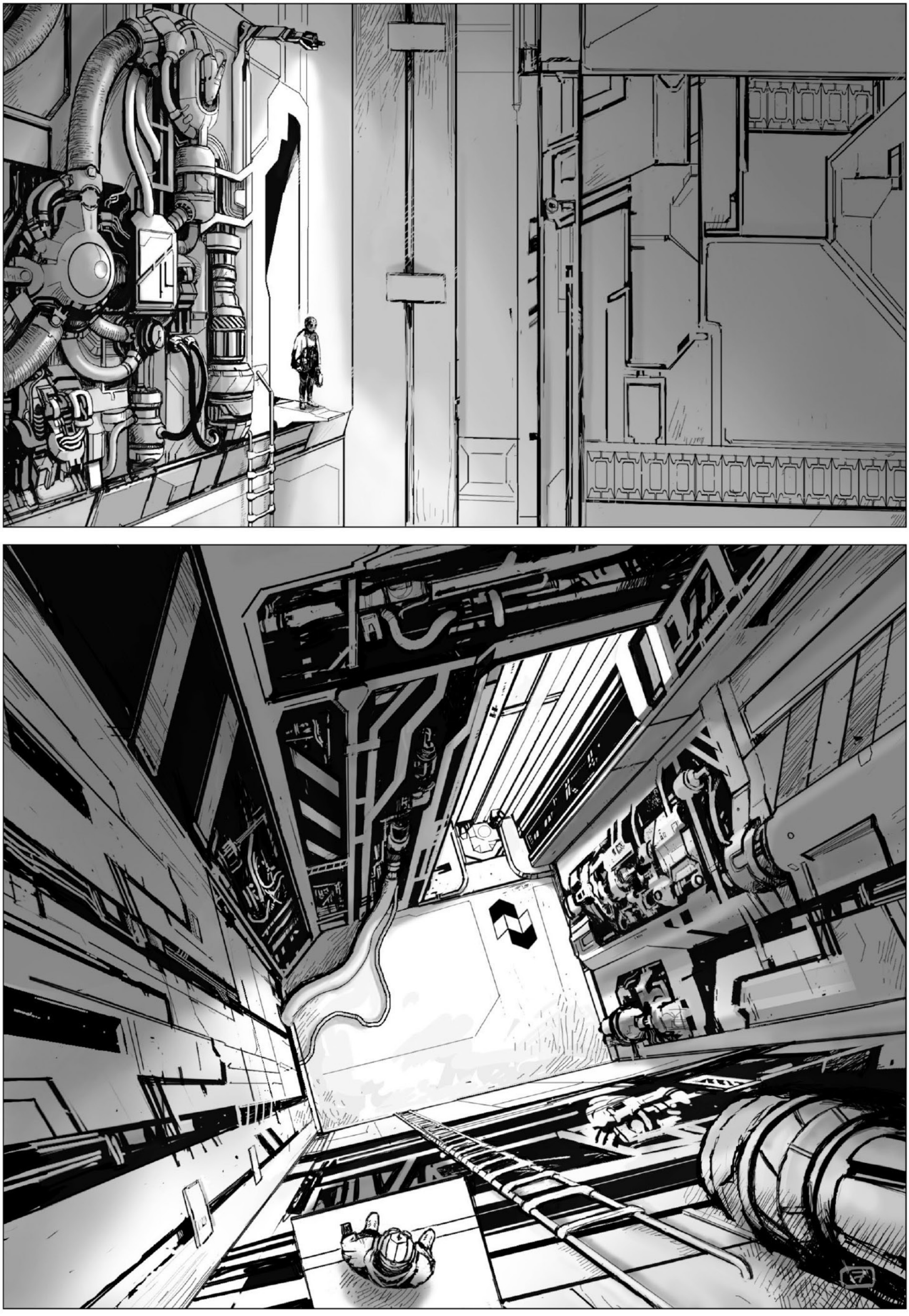
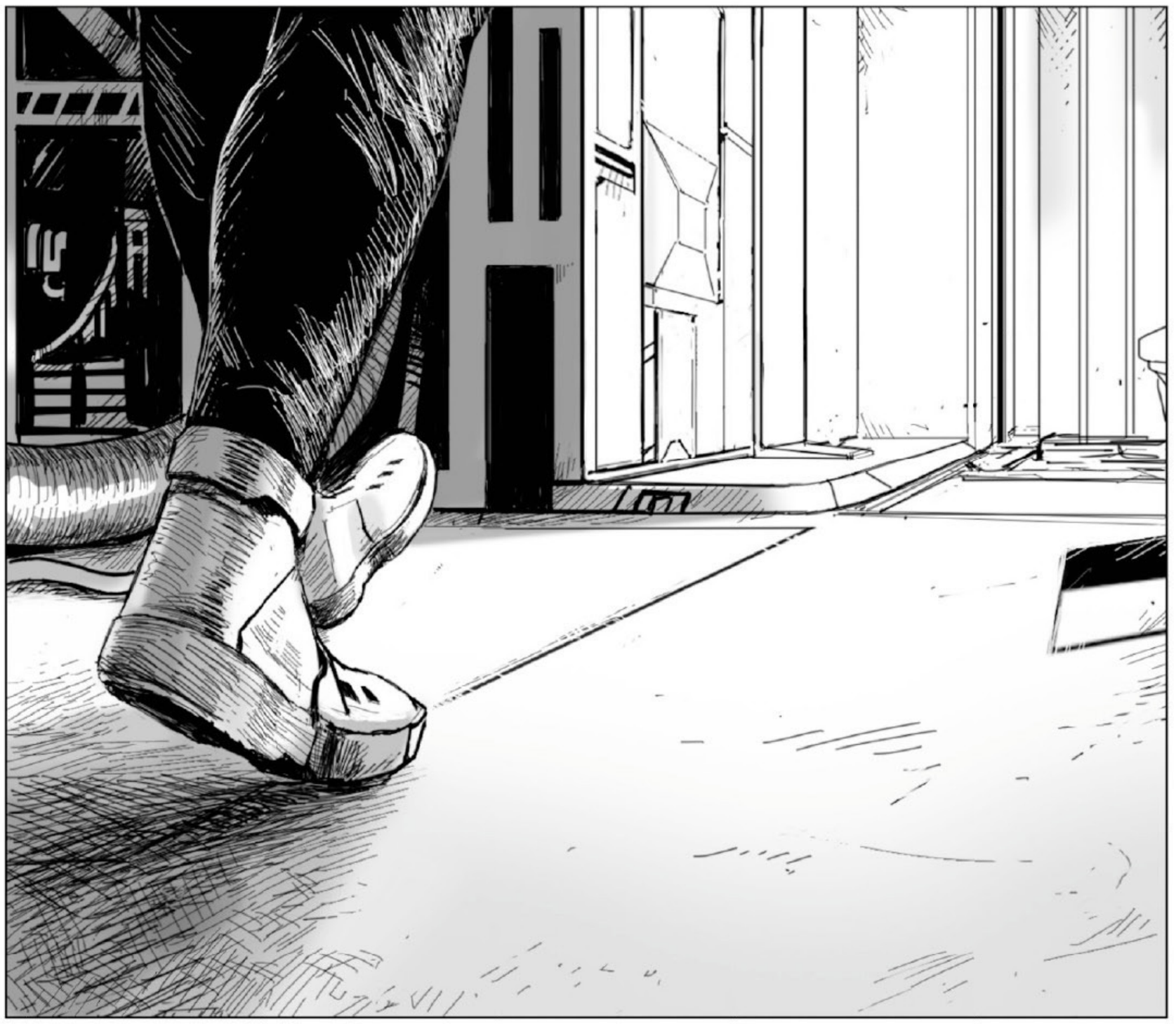
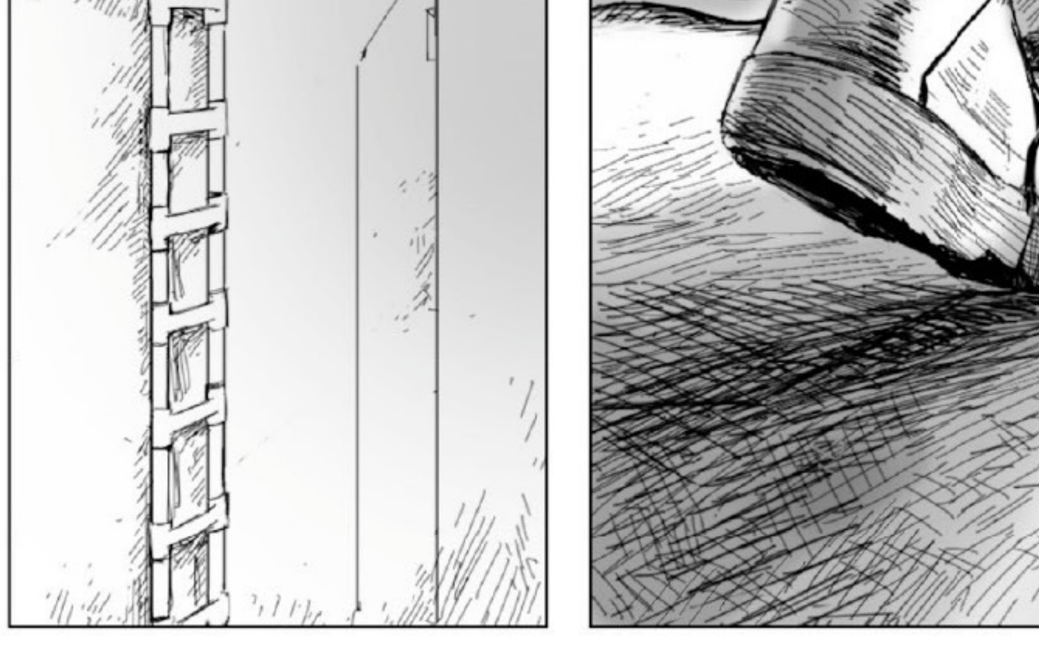










FWWOOOMMMMMMM

LANGUAGE CORRECTION...

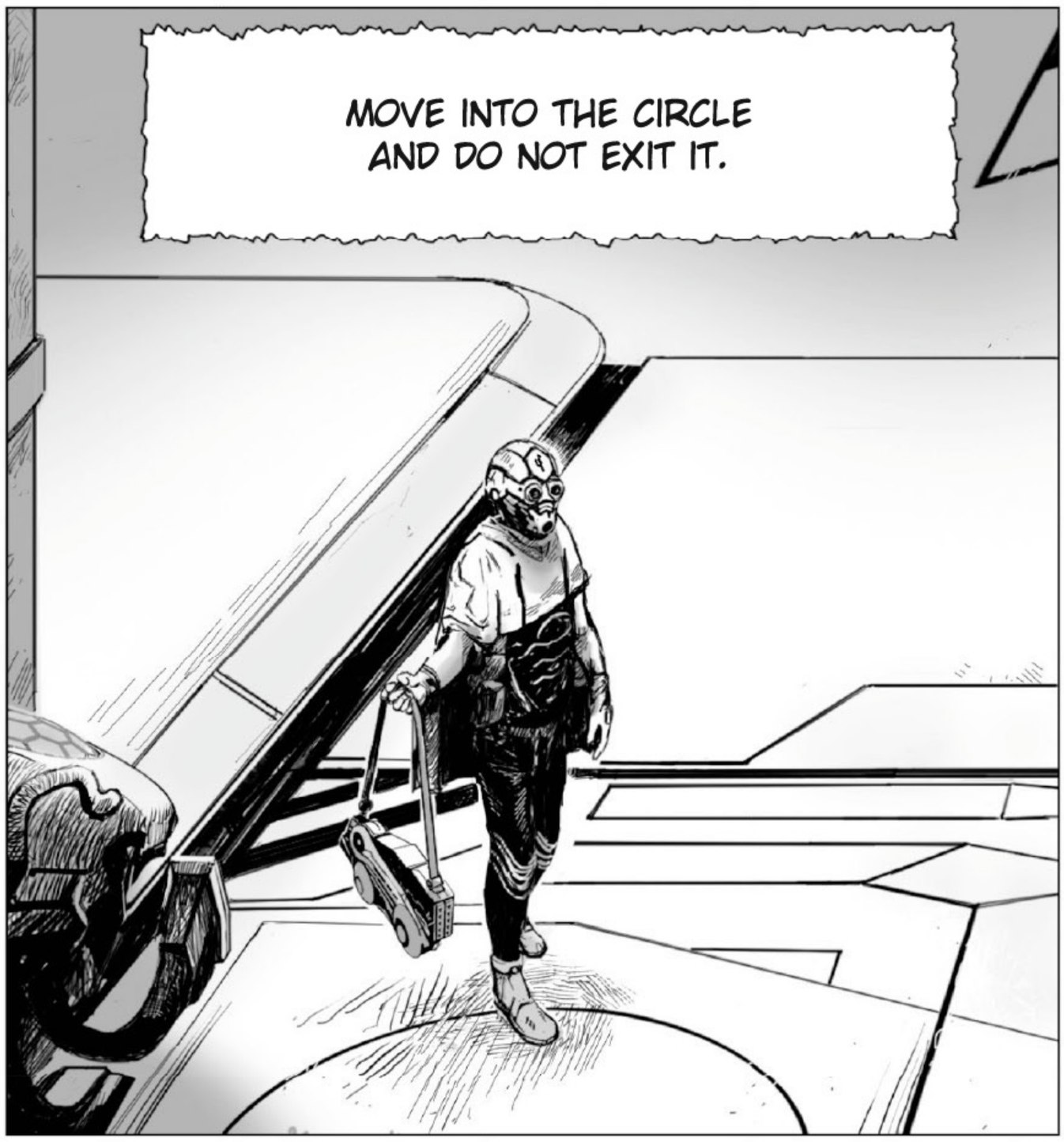
I NEED TO KNOW IF THIS ELEVATOR GOES TO LEVEL 237.

.....

... NEGATIVE...CR...THIS SYSTEM STOPS BEFORE... LVL# 237...

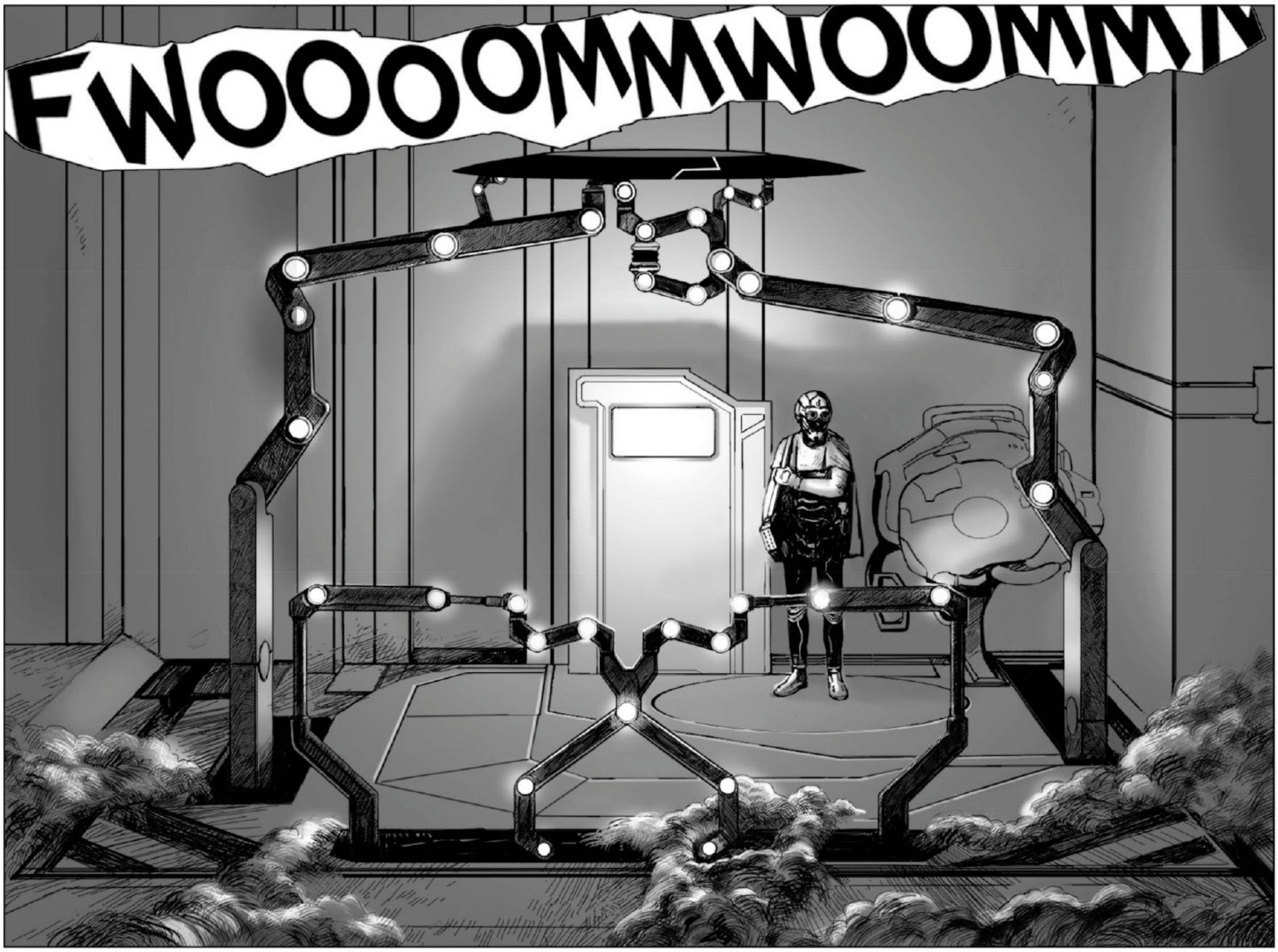
AT WHAT EXACT DISTANCE?

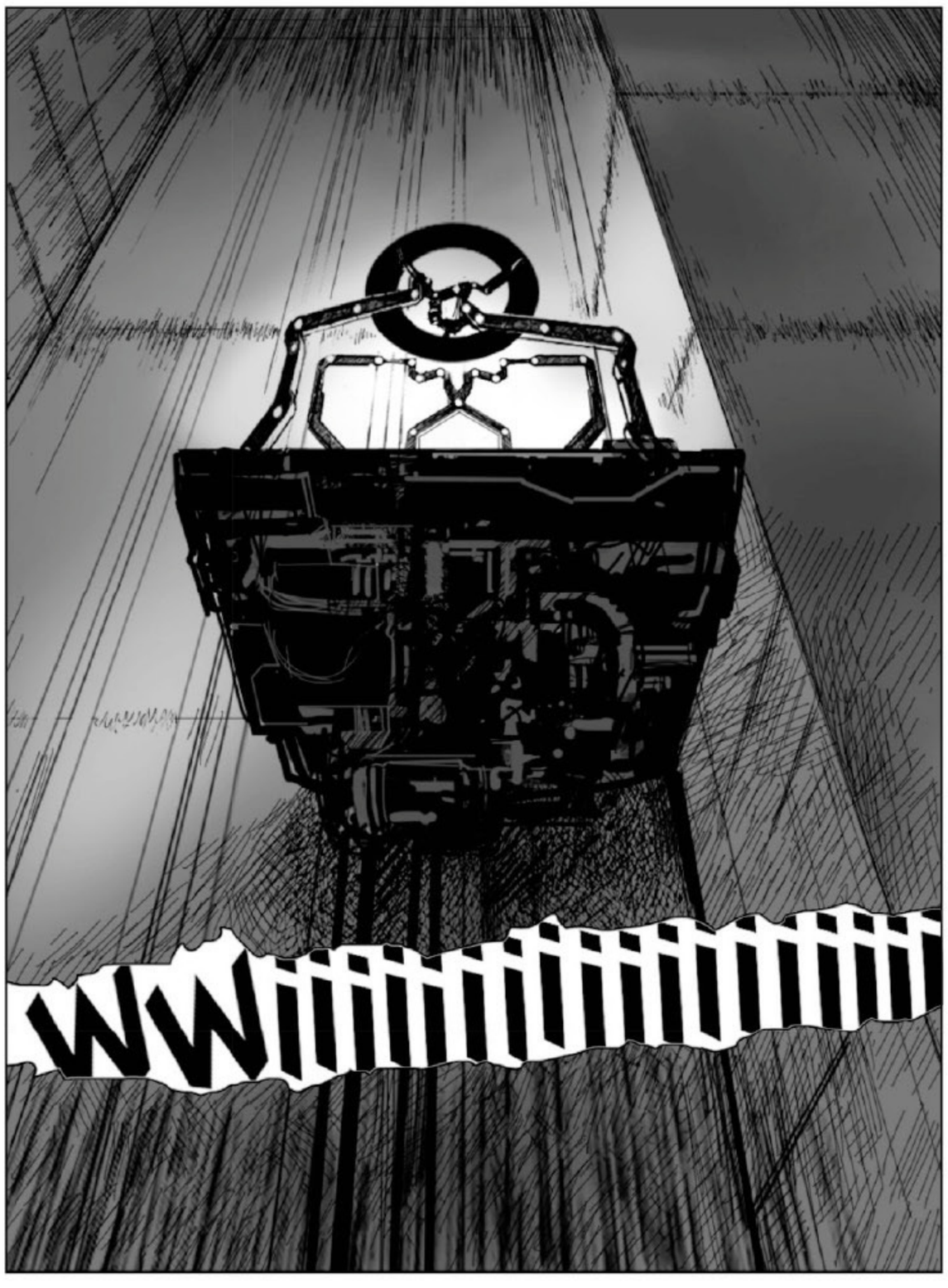
... ESTIMATE DISTANCE COVERED AT 18,000 METRES... CCRRR... REMAINING ELEVATION DIFFERENTIAL OF 2,300 METRES IN THE BREACH...

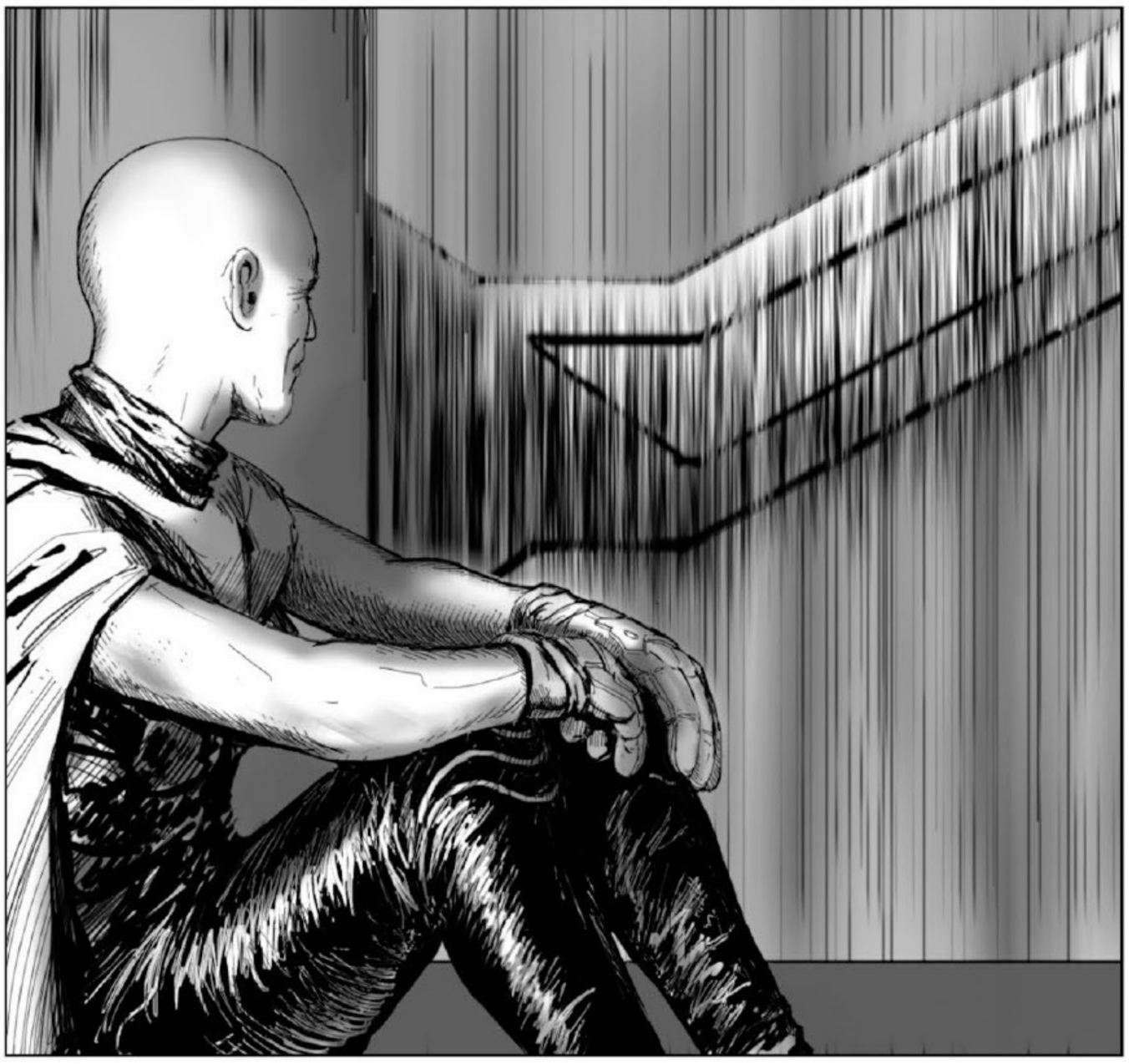

MOVE INTO THE CIRCLE
AND DO NOT EXIT IT.

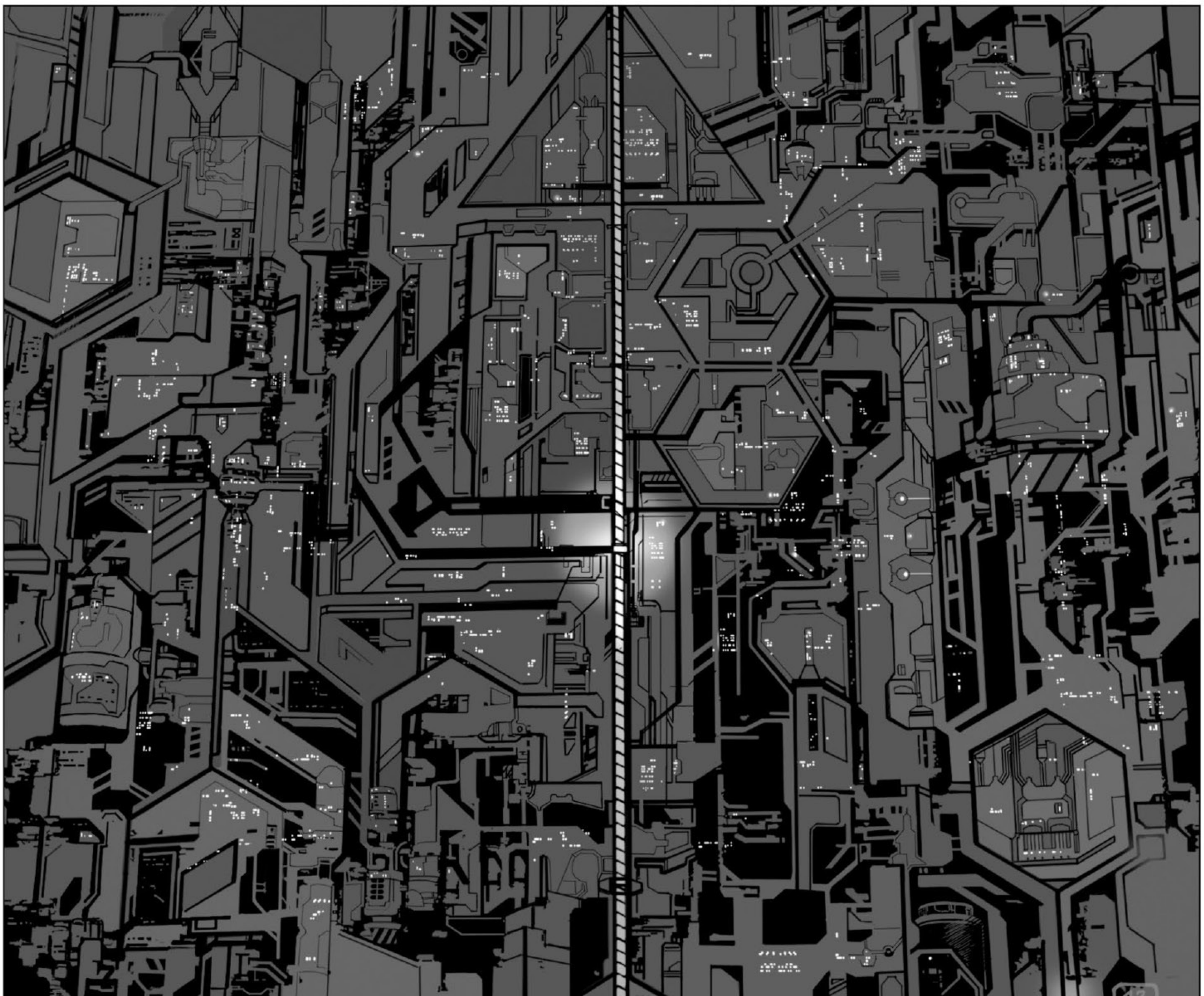
DEPLOYING
STRUCTURE.

KSHHH
KCHAAAC
FSHHHH
10




WWWW





LATER AND MUCH HIGHER...

SNOW OR ASHES?

ZZZZZZZZZZZZ

ZOOMING
1593%

Data acquisition...

tracking...
source 1
--source 2

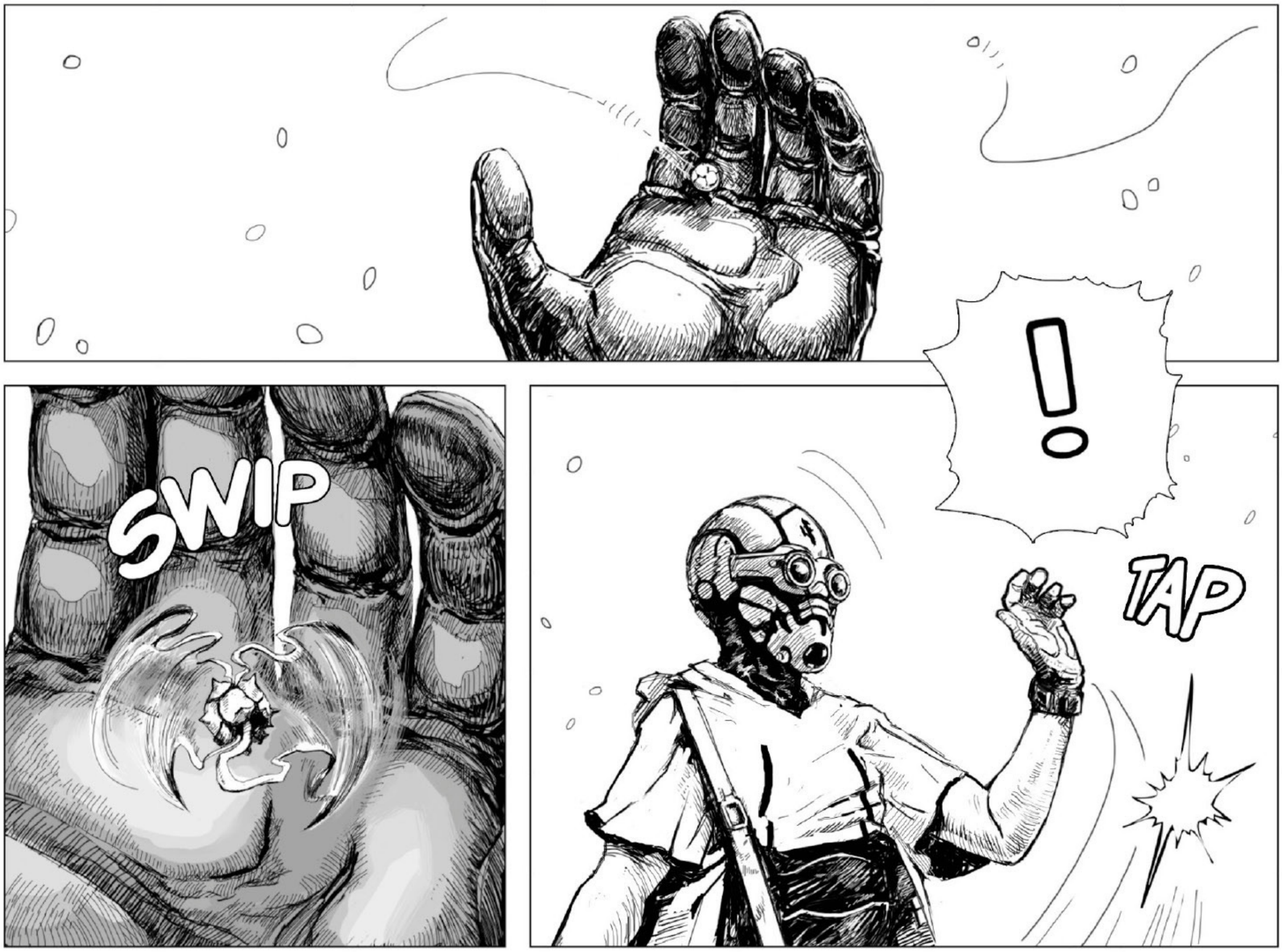
enhancing
BIOdatabase
ON

ANALYSIS
status : in progress...

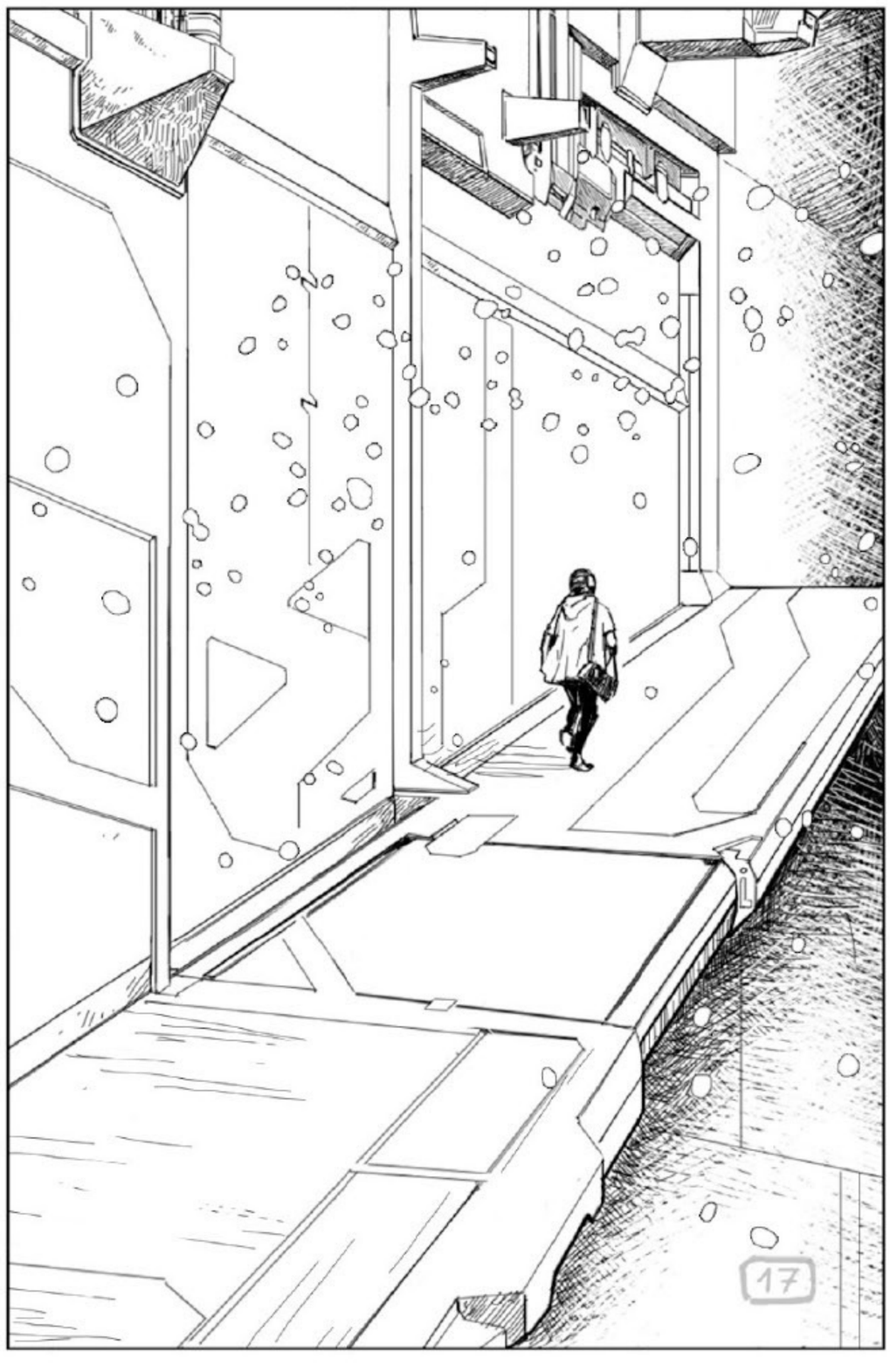
DONE

/95% probability
VEGETAL LIFEFORM

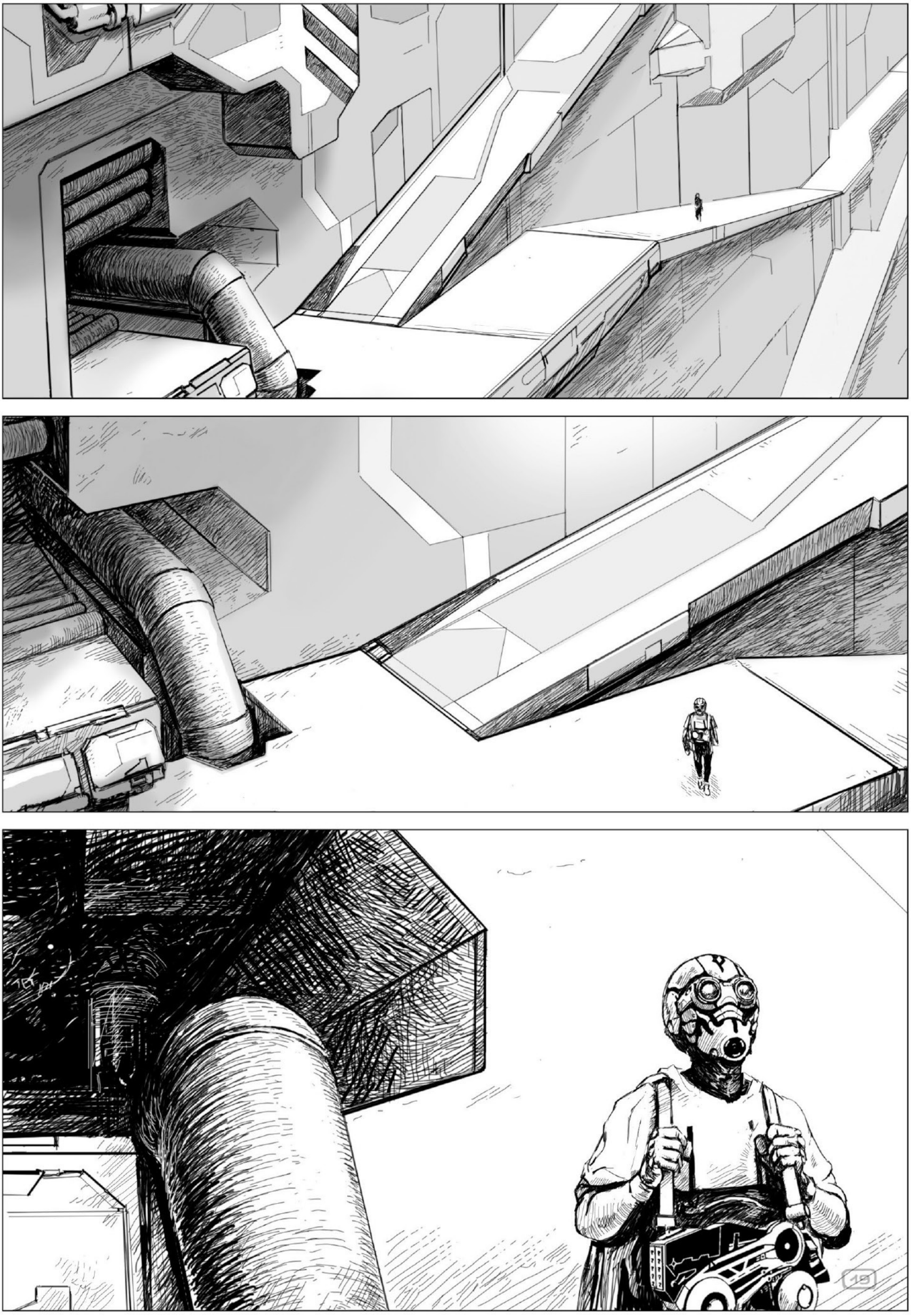
... SPORES?


SWIP
!!
TAP

YEAH...
I GUESS I DON'T REALLY WANT TO KNOW ANY MORE!
PLANT OR NOT, THESE THINGS ARE WRIGGLING ABOUT A LITTLE TOO MUCH FOR MY TASTE!


17

18



DAMN BREACH!
I MUST HAVE SEEN
DOZENS OF THEM,
BUT IT TAKES MY BREATH
AWAY EVERY TIME!

HOW DID
THAT QUOTE GO
AGAIN?

"THE GODS ARE
INCLINED TO CUT
DOWN ANYTHING
THAT EXALTS
ITSELF."

HMMMM...

MAYBE
THE WISDOM OF
THE ANCIENT
GREEKS DOESN'T
REALLY APPLY TO
EXTRATER...

!

...RESTRIALS!

OKAY... CALM DOWN, BIG GUY... I DIDN'T SEE YOU THERE...

I'LL LEAVE YOU IN PEACE... YOU SEE? I'M GOING NOW.

RHHRRHRRRHRRRHHR

I'M ABSOLUTELY NO THREAT TO YOU...

IT SHIT SHIT SHIT SH
IT SHIT SHIT SHIT SHI
HIT SHIT SHIT SHIT SH
T SHIT SHIT SHIT SH

THERE!
BE CALM!
BE CALM,
GOOD BOY!

RRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR

SHIT,
WHAT THE HELL
AM I DOING!?

IT'S NOT
A PONY!

!?

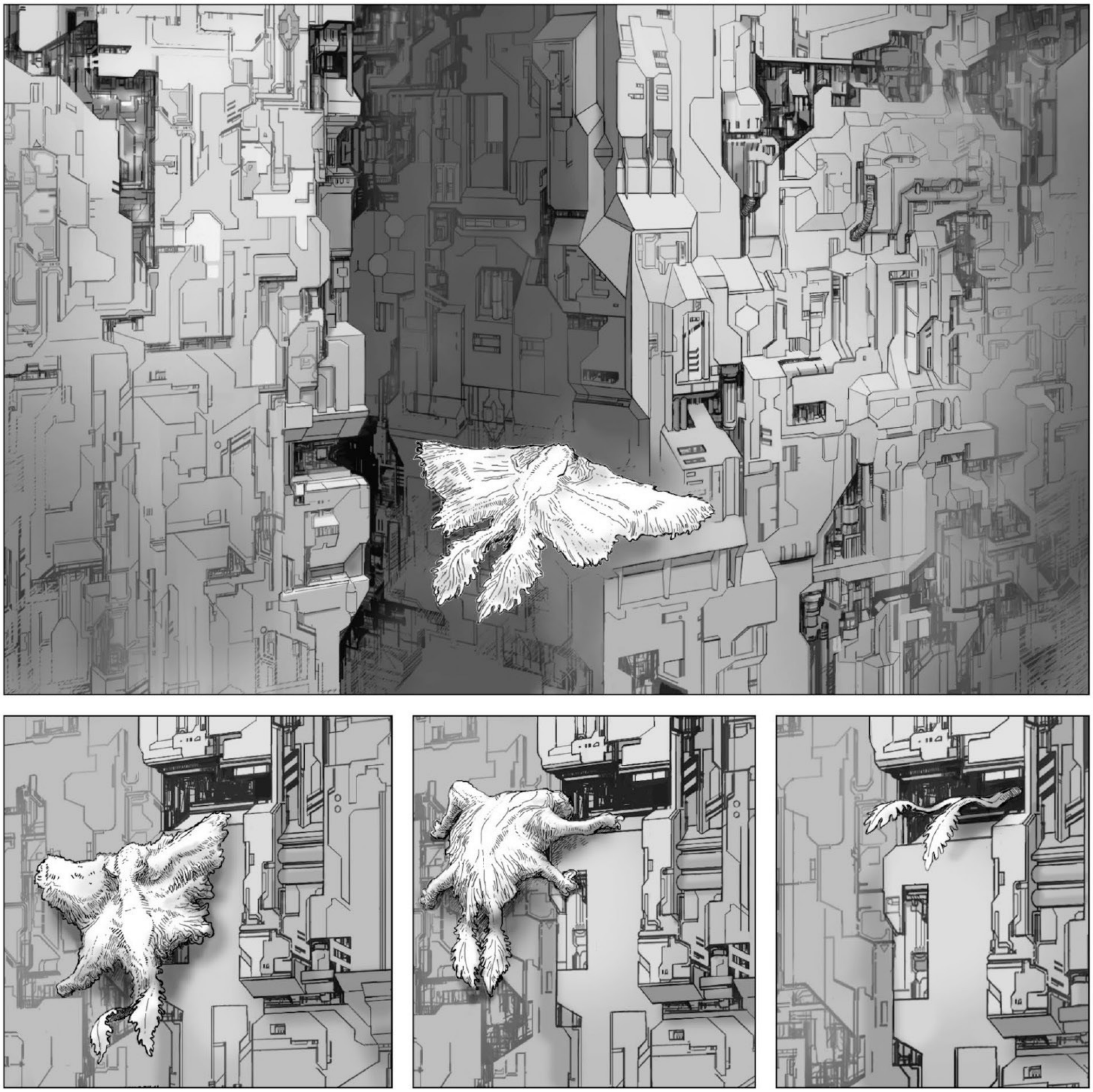
RRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR

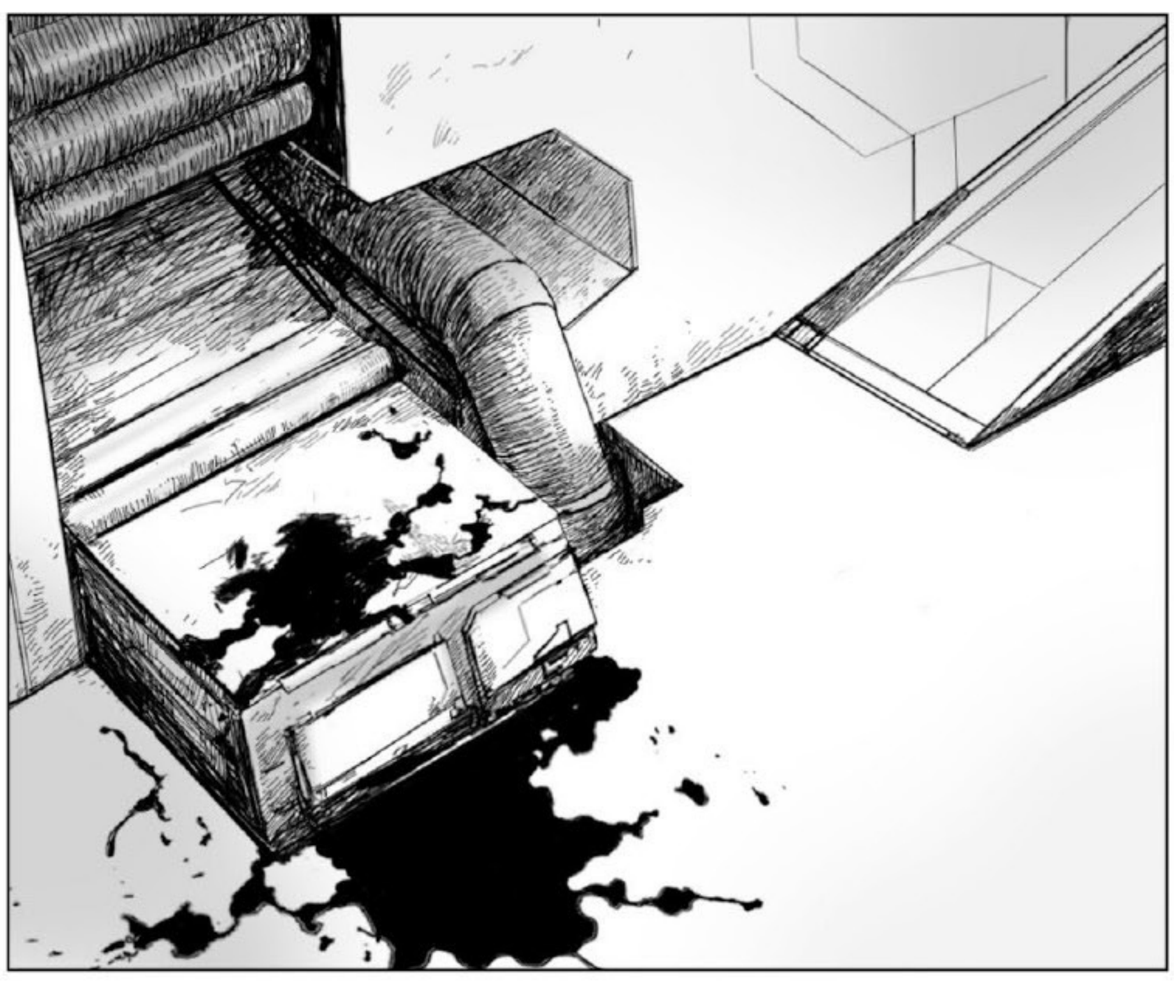
ALRIGHT,
NOW I REALLY
DON'T HAVE
ANY CHOICE!

SPROTCH

GRIP

CHEU





PFF

PFF

FFSHHH

THUD

HUH? THAT SYMBOL... THAT'S LEVEL 237!

HAHAHAHA!!!

YOU WON'T GET ME THIS TIME, FUCKING SHIP!

GETTING SURPRISED LIKE THAT THOUGH...

I NEED SOME REST.

BUT IT'S NOT LIKE 237 IS GOING ANYWHERE...

COME ON, LUPO, ONE LAST EFFORT!

THE MESA CAN WAIT UNTIL TOMORROW...

NO-ONE IN HERE? PERFECT!

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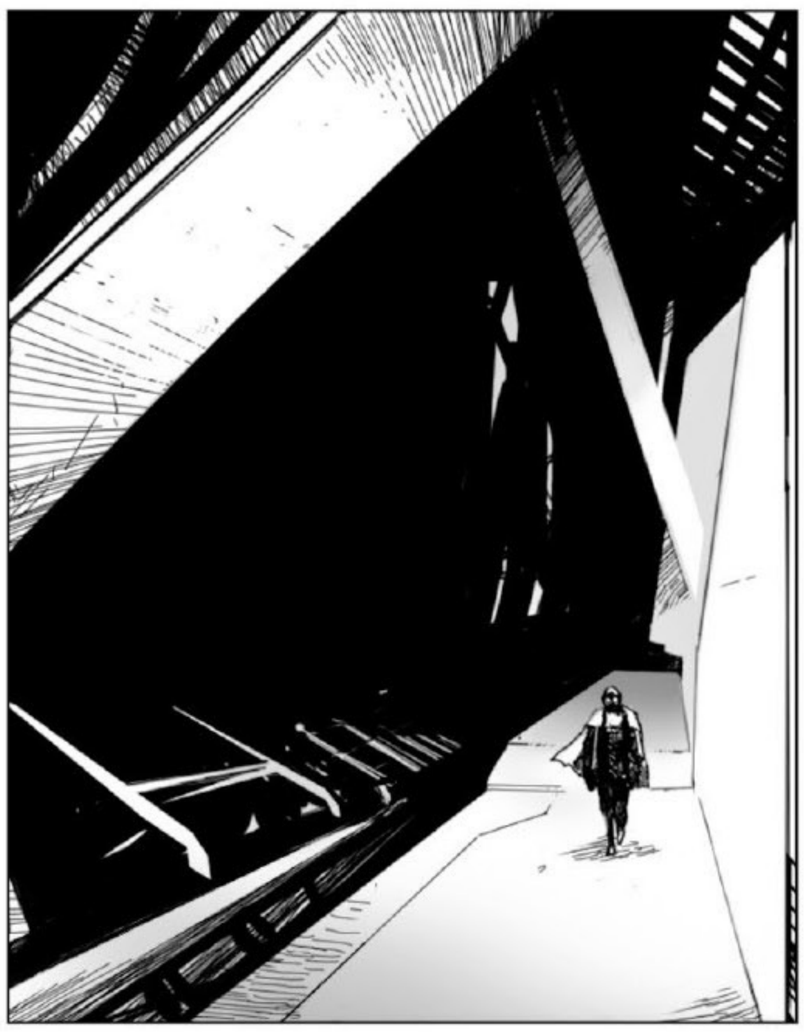
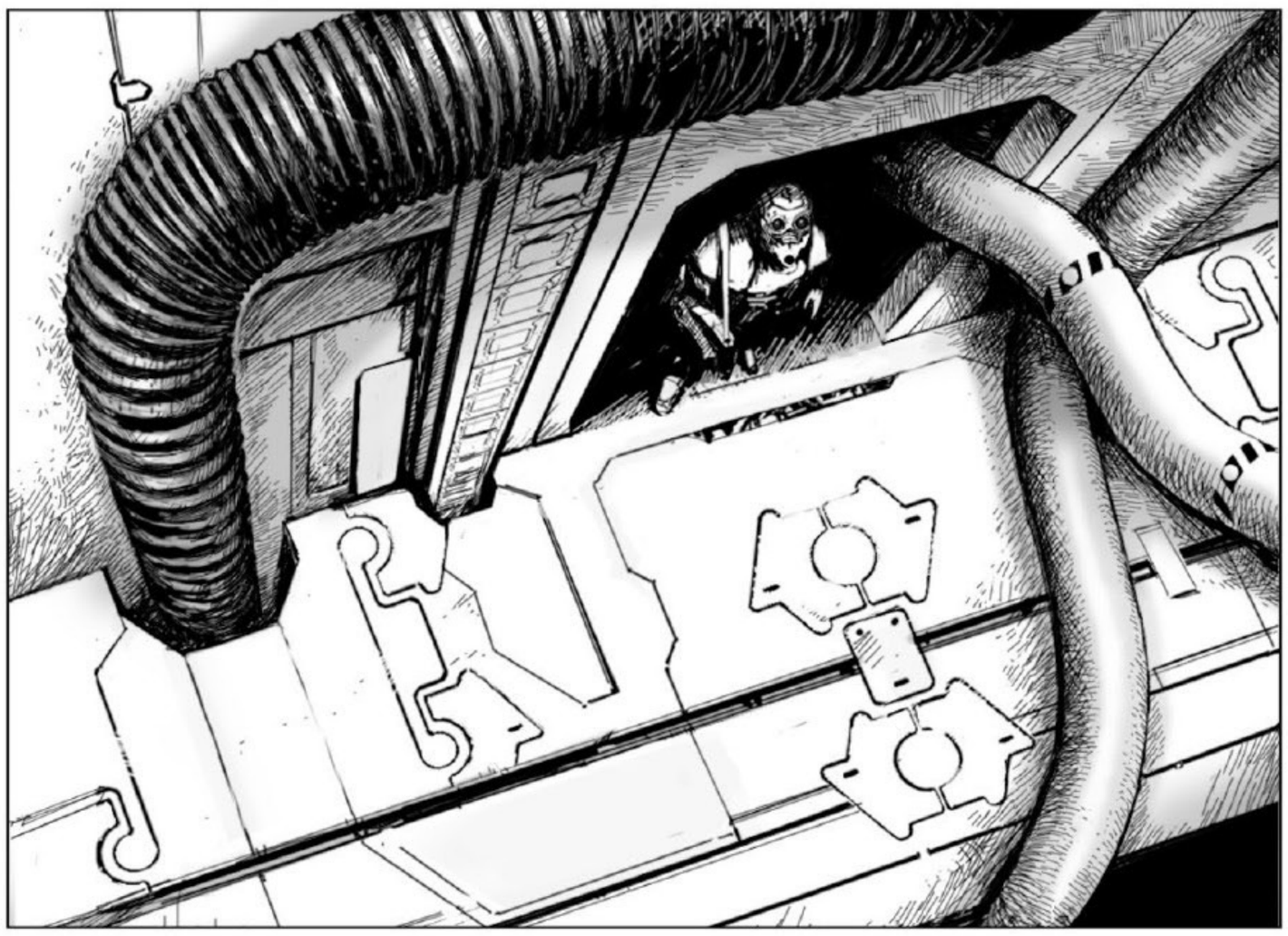




WHAT THE...?

I'M GETTING DIZZY...

THAT'S RIGHT... IT SOMETIMES HAPPENS AFTER TOO MUCH TIME IN THE BREACH!

MY BRAIN'S JUST NOT USED TO SUCH WIDE OPEN SPACES.

LOOK AT THE GROUND, IT'LL PASS!

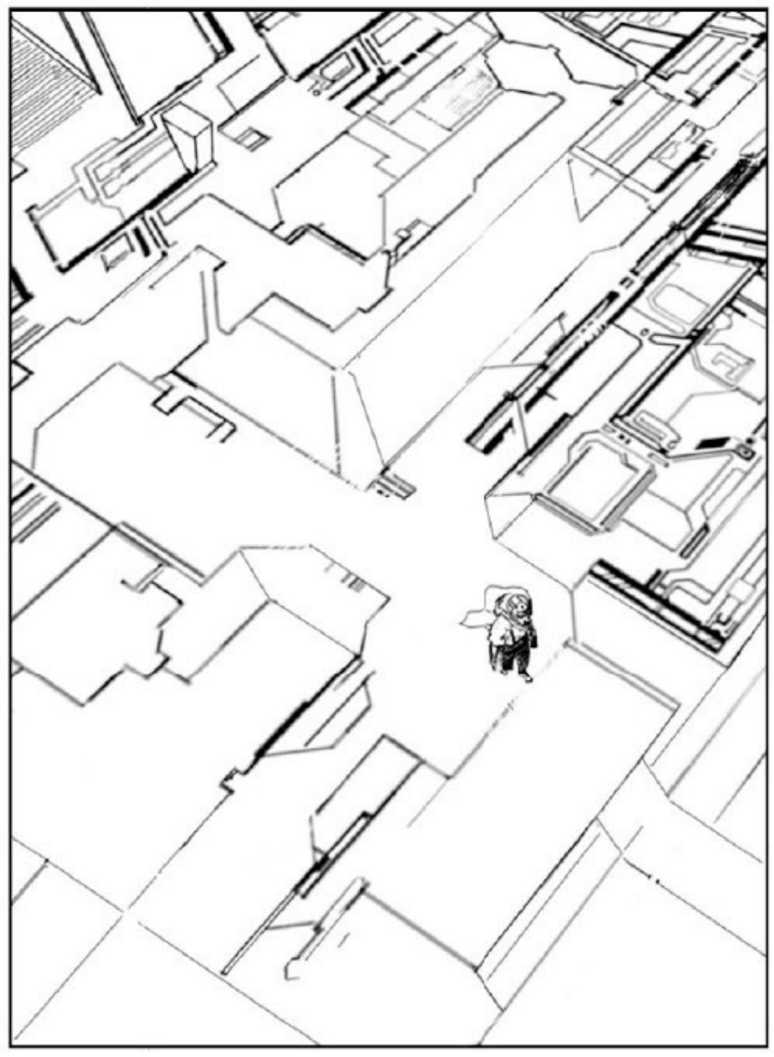
THERE, BETTER ALREADY...

HEY, I DIDN'T NOTICE THAT STRUCTURE BEFORE... COULD IT BE...?

HARD TO BE SURE FROM THIS DISTANCE, BUT IT DOES LOOK LIKE A COMMS TOWER...

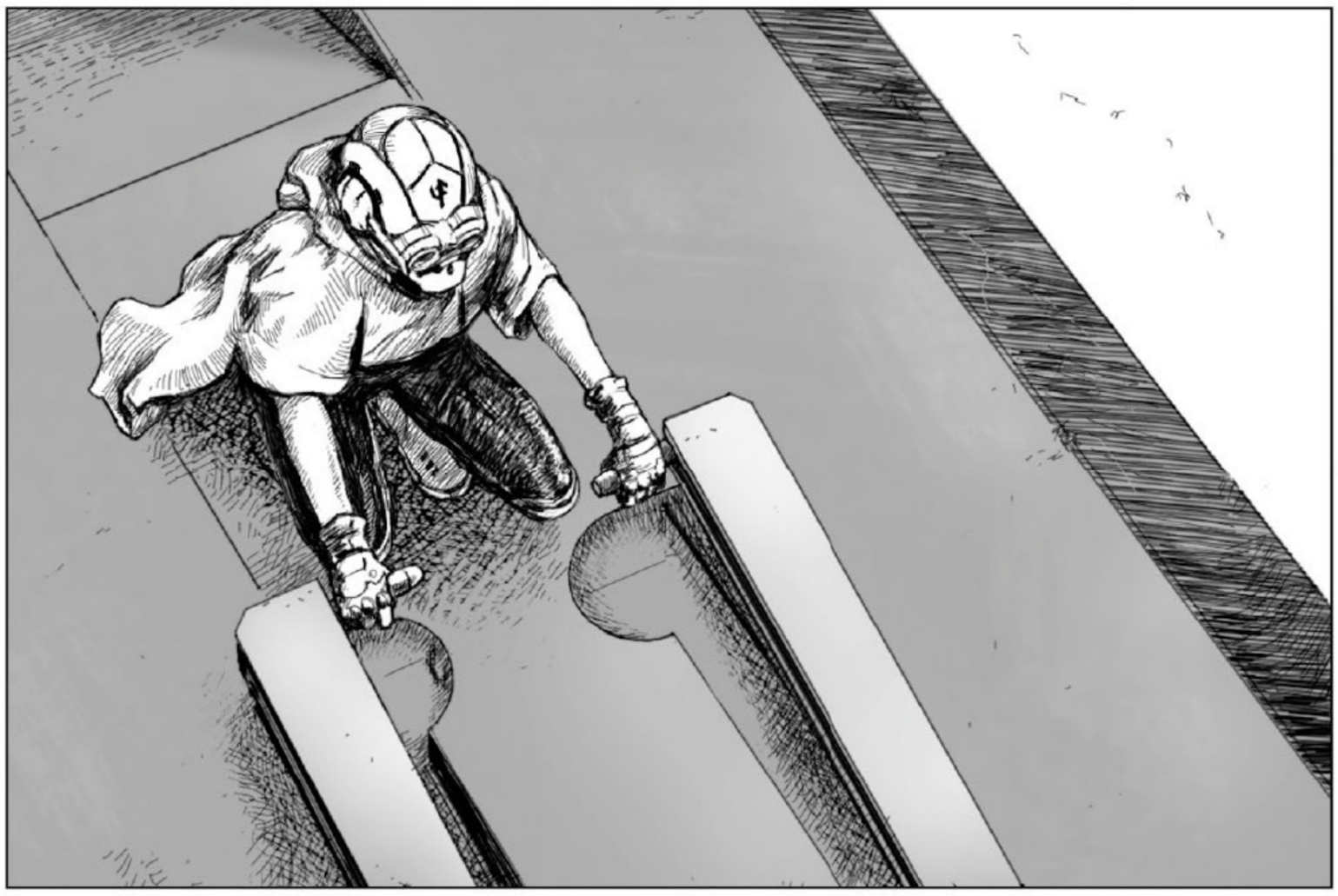
I HAVE TO GO CHECK IT OUT! IF IT STILL WORKS, I COULD REPORT IN TO PORO...

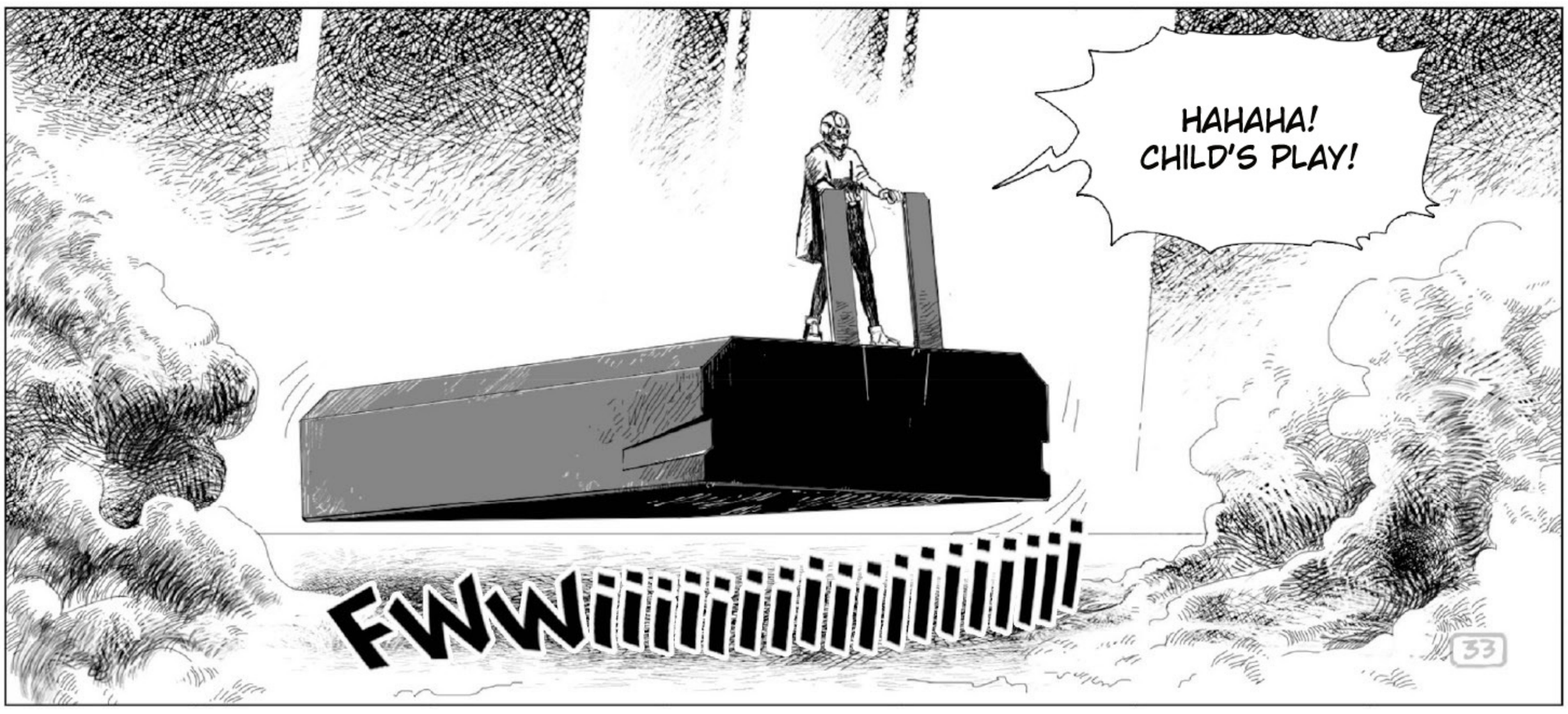
IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE MY LAST REPORT!



!?

WELL, WHY NOT?




HAHAHA!
CHILD'S PLAY!
FWWiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii
33

RESPONSIVE CONTROLS... LEFT, RIGHT, PUSH BOTH FORWARD TO ACCELERATE...

ALRIGHT, LET'S SEE WHAT YOU'VE GOT!

FWWOOOOSHHHHHH

SHIT, FEELS LIKE IT'S PULLING TO THE RIGHT!

I'M GOING TOO FAST! I CAN'T STOP IT IN TI...

SHIT!!

RAAAAAAAAAKKK

CRRRRRRRRRRRR

THUD

THUMP

ON FOOT THEN... ALRIGHT!

HOW FAR AWAY IS THAT DAMN TOWER?

ZZZZZZZZZ

ZZZZZZZZ

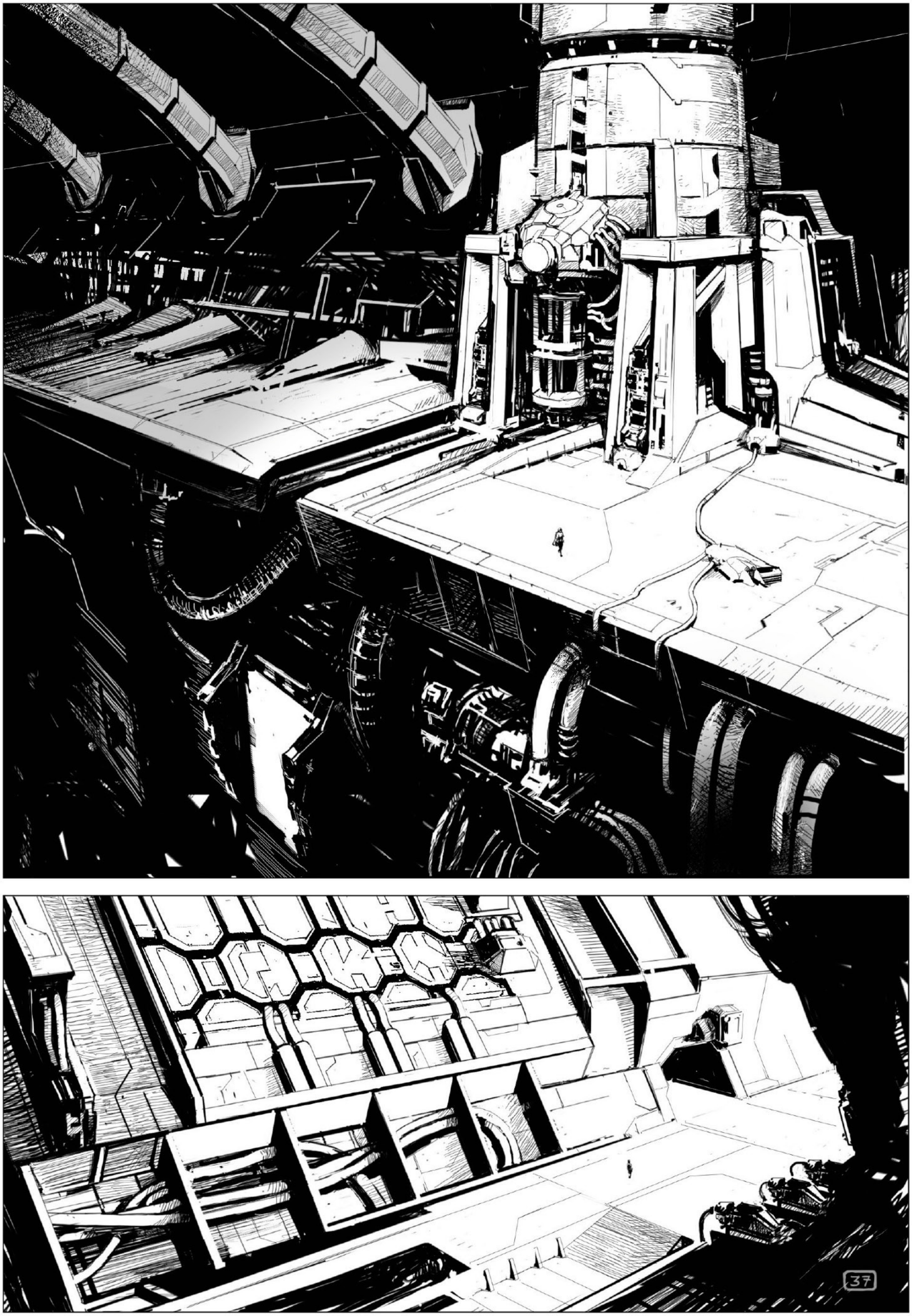
ZZZZZZZZ...

Error...
code 13

COME ON! WHAT'S WRONG WITH THESE GOGGLES?

NO GOOD! ZOOM'S NOT WORKING, NEITHER ARE THE ALTERNATE MODES... MUST HAVE BEEN THE CRASH...

FINE... BETTER TRAVEL LIGHT!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FSHHHHH

LOOKS LIKE A PRIMITIVE ECOSYSTEM... IF ONLY JENNA COULD SEE THIS...

PLASH

!?

BUT... AN ECOSYSTEM MEANS THERE IS PREY... AND PREDATORS... I NEED TO BE...

!

... CAREFUL!

THE STRUCTURES ARE HEAVILY DAMAGED IN THIS AREA... WHAT THE HELL ARE THE DRONES DOING?

!?

HEY, PSSSST!

OVER HERE!

DON'T BOTHER HIDING, I SAW YOU ARRIVE.

ARE WE STILL ON EARTH?

AS FAR AS I KNOW, YES! WELL, IN A MANNER OF SPEAKING...

LET'S JUST SAY IT'S SOMEWHERE BENEATH OUR FEET...

WELL, I THINK SO... WE MIGHT BE IN ANOTHER GALAXY...

ON A SHIP OF THIS SIZE, I'M NOT SURE WE'D EVER KNOW...

HMMM...

CAN I DO ANYTHING FOR YOU?

YEAH... YOU GOT ANYTHING TO EAT?

I'M REALLY HUNGRY...

I HAVE NUTRIENT BARS... THEY AREN'T GOOD BUT THEY ARE FILLING.

YOU HUMAN?

...

YEAH, DON'T WORRY... BUT I'M NOT INTERESTED IN YOUR BARS. YOU GOT ANYTHING ELSE?

IS THAT YOURS, THAT... DOG?

AH! THERE YOU ARE!

NO, HE'S NOT MY DOG! AND HE'S NOT EVEN A DOG, BY THE WAY!

HE'S BEEN FOLLOWING ME FOR HOURS... HE'S MY NEW FRIEND!

BUT HE WON'T LET ME TOUCH HIM... NOT YET.

SNIF

YOU KNOW, IF YOU WANT SOME MEAT, YOU'LL HAVE TO HUNT! THERE ARE EDIBLE SPECIES HERE...

BUT YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT IF YOU LIVE IN THIS PLACE...

OR HAVE YOU BEEN SURVIVING OFF THE KINDNESS OF PASSING STRANGERS?

I CAN'T MOVE. I'M... STUCK IN HERE... THERE'S SOMETHING EATING AWAY AT MY LEG...

AN INFECTION? A DISEASE? LIKE... LEPROSY?

NO...

MORE LIKE AN ANIMAL...

IN THE GROUND...

...

I'M SORRY TO ASK YOU THIS SINCE YOU SEEM LIKE YOU'RE... ERM... IN THE SHIT, BUT...

... DO YOU KNOW HOW TO OPEN THE TORANAS?

YOU KNOW, THOSE HUGE BLACK GATES...

YOU MUST HAVE SEEN THEM... YOU CAN'T MISS THEM...

TO BE HONEST I HAVEN'T BEEN OUT...

... IN A WHILE...

... BUT I'VE NEVER SEEN ONE OF THOSE.

I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT...

ALRIGHT!

TOC

I'LL LEAVE YOU A FEW BARS. BUT THAT'S ALL I CAN DO FOR YOU.

THEY SHOULD KEEP YOU GOING FOR A WHILE IF YOU RATION THEM...

I'LL LEAVE THEM OUTSIDE, OK?

ALRIGHT, I'M GOING NOW. AND... ERM... GOOD LUCK?

...

I GUESS?

!?

SSRLAFF

YIK

WOOSH

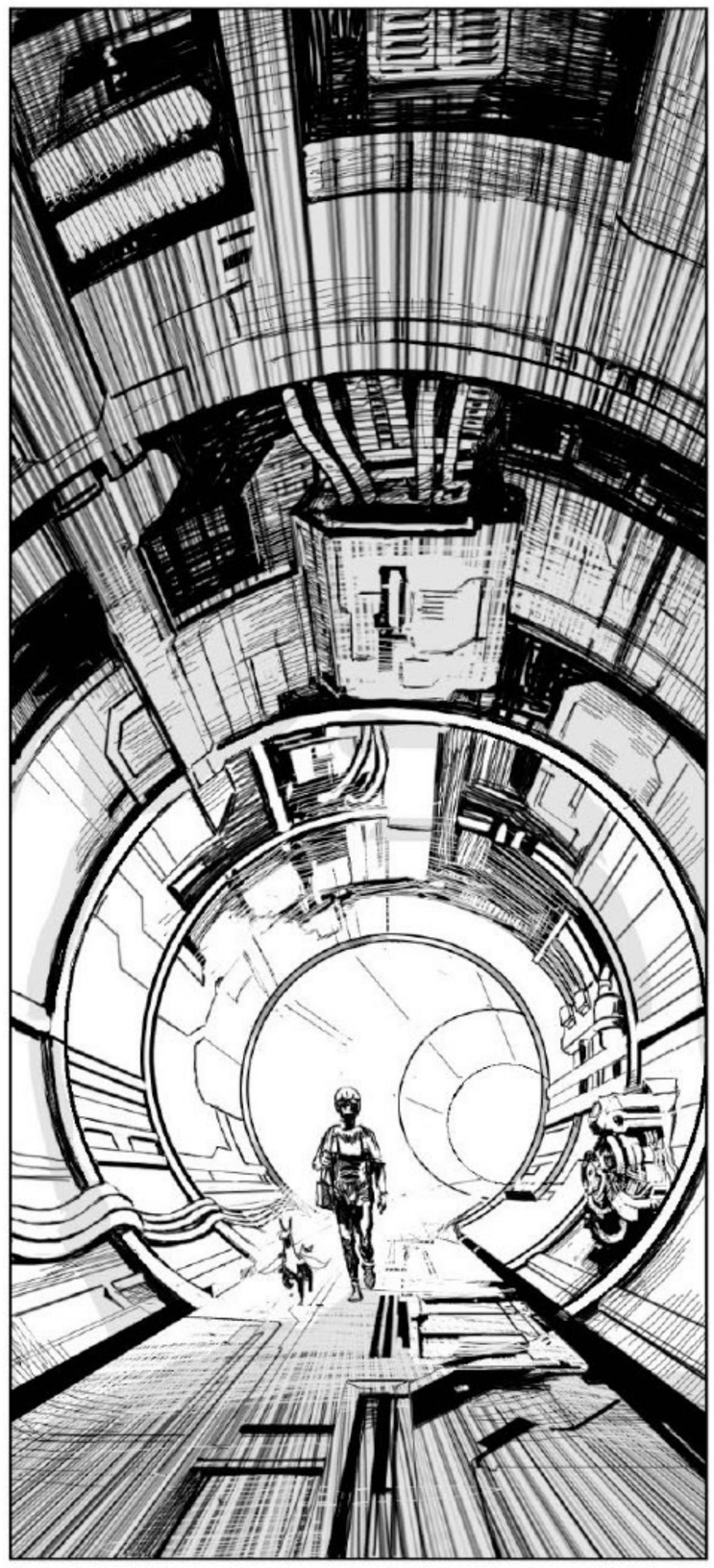
SPLITCH

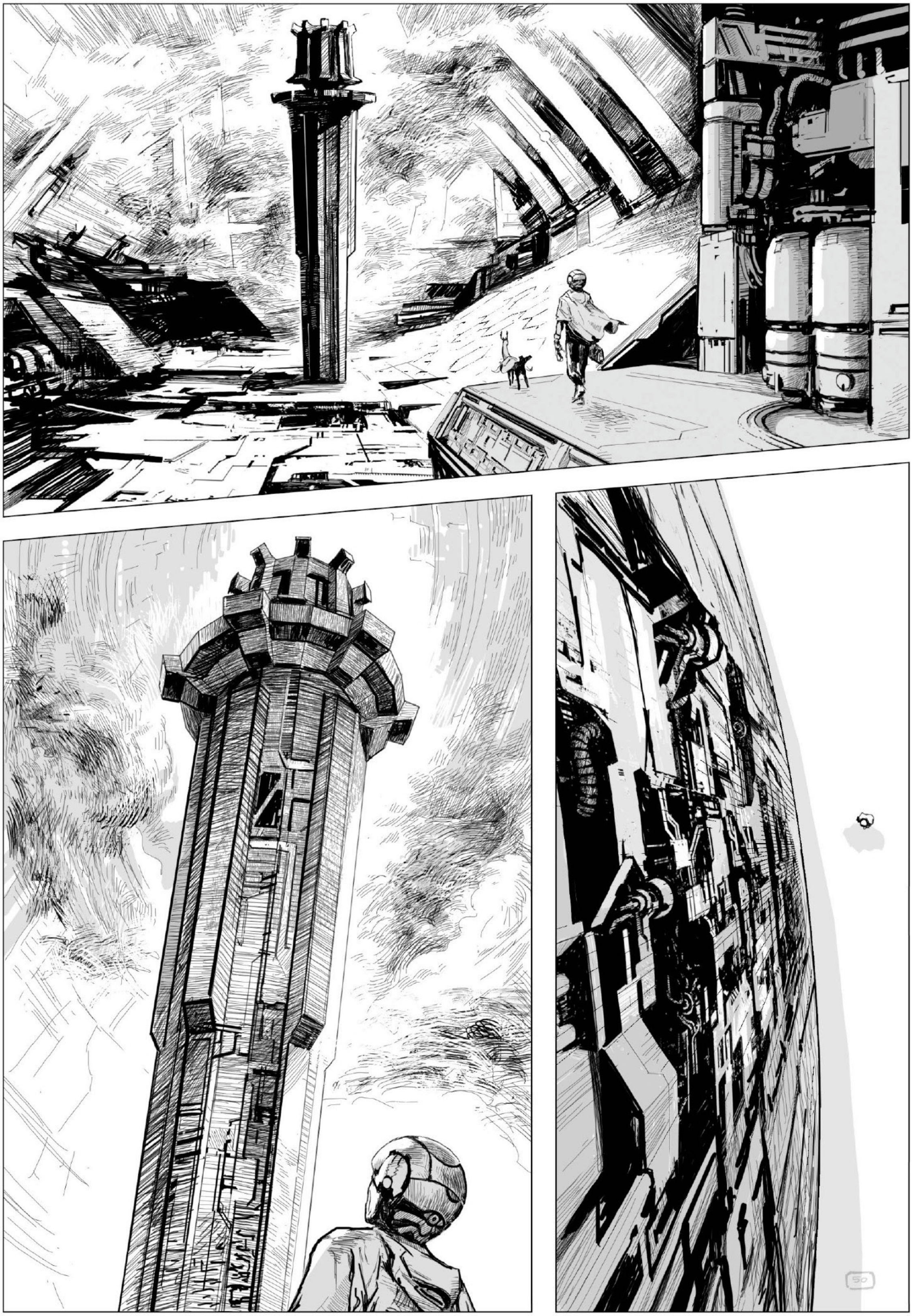
AAARH

TIGIDIP TIGIDIP

AH, THERE YOU ARE! YOU'RE STAYING WITH ME FOR NOW THEN?

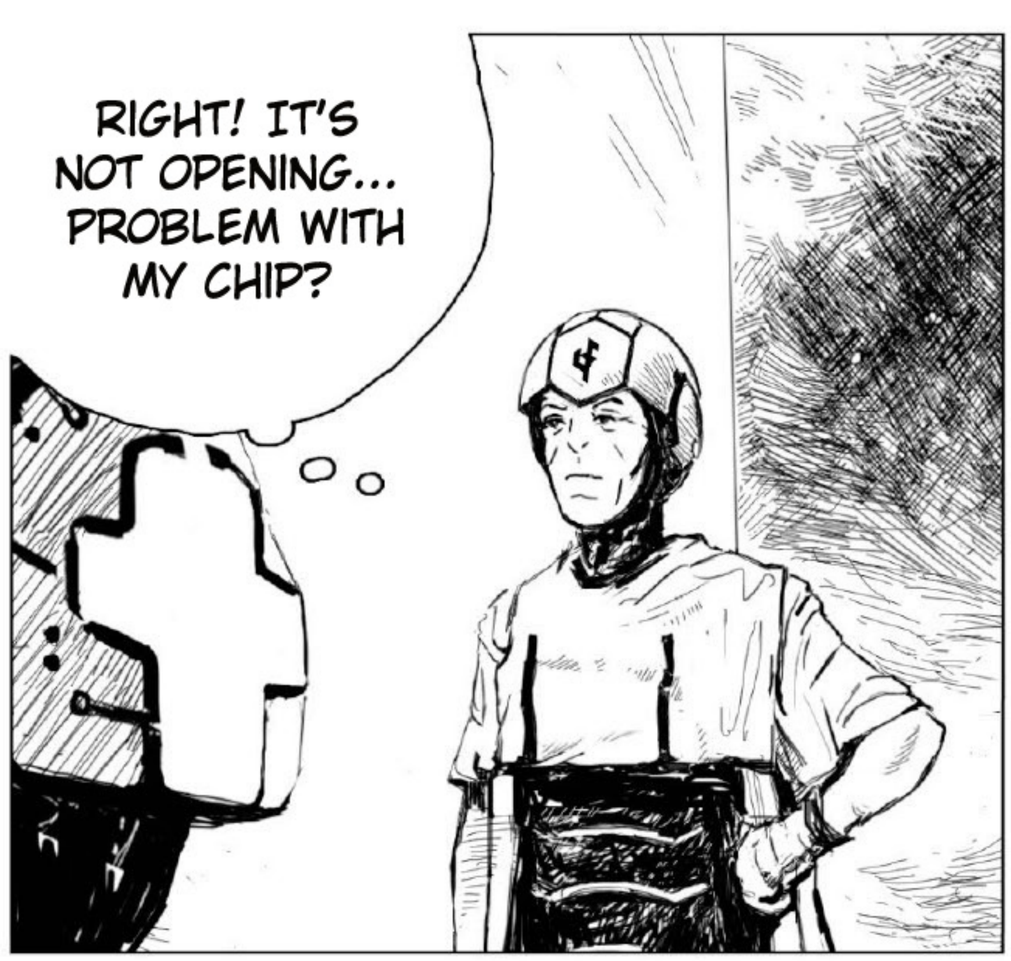
THAT'S COOL!





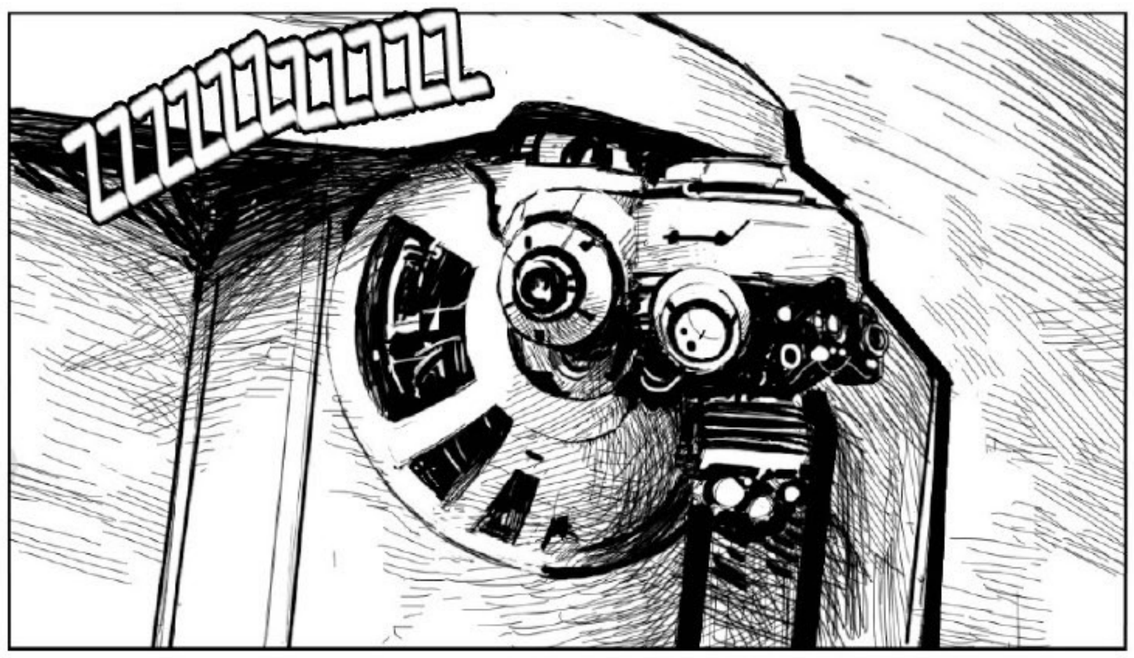
AND THERE'S THE DOOR.
HARD TO MISS...

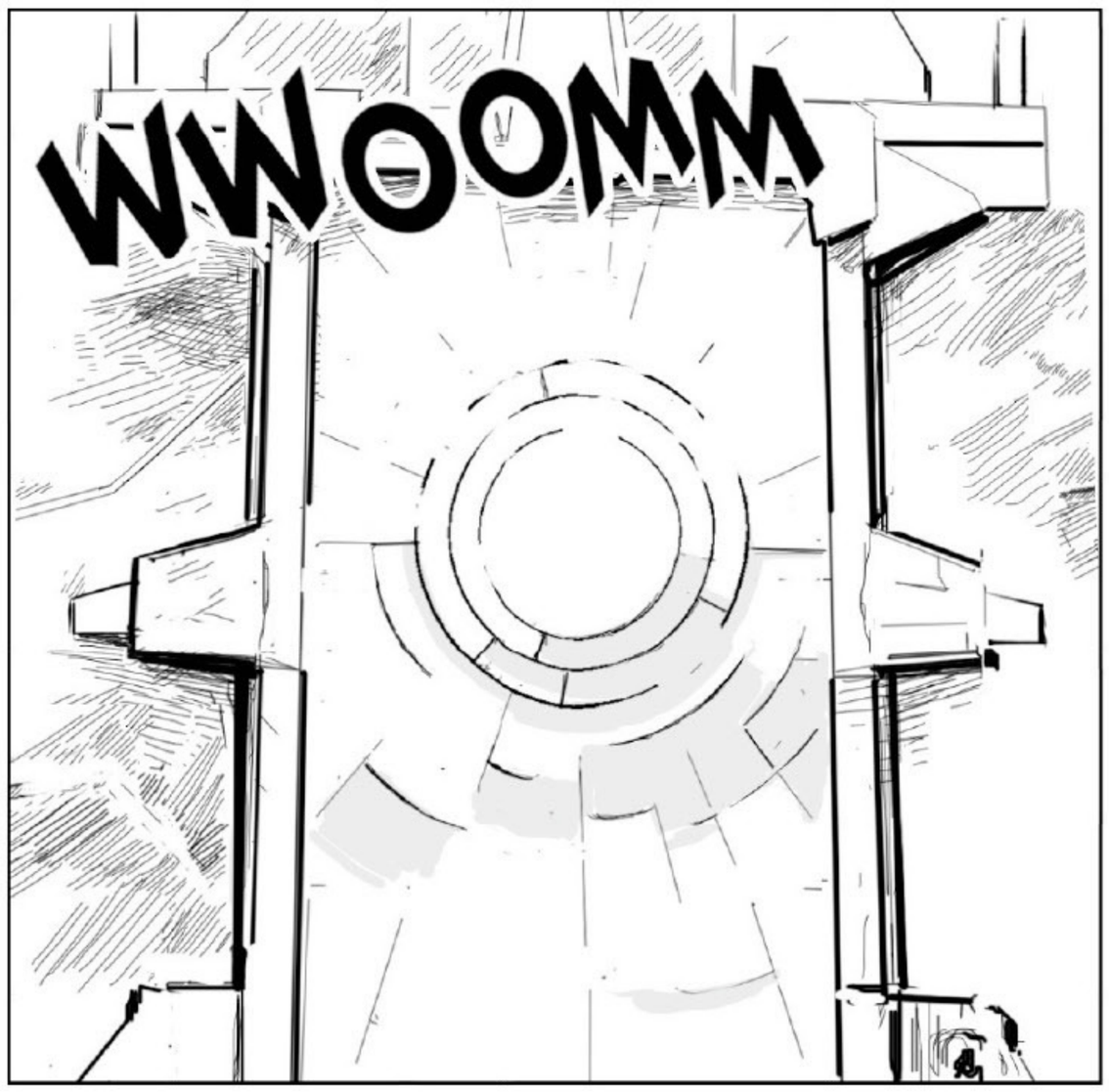
?


RIGHT! IT'S NOT OPENING... PROBLEM WITH MY CHIP?

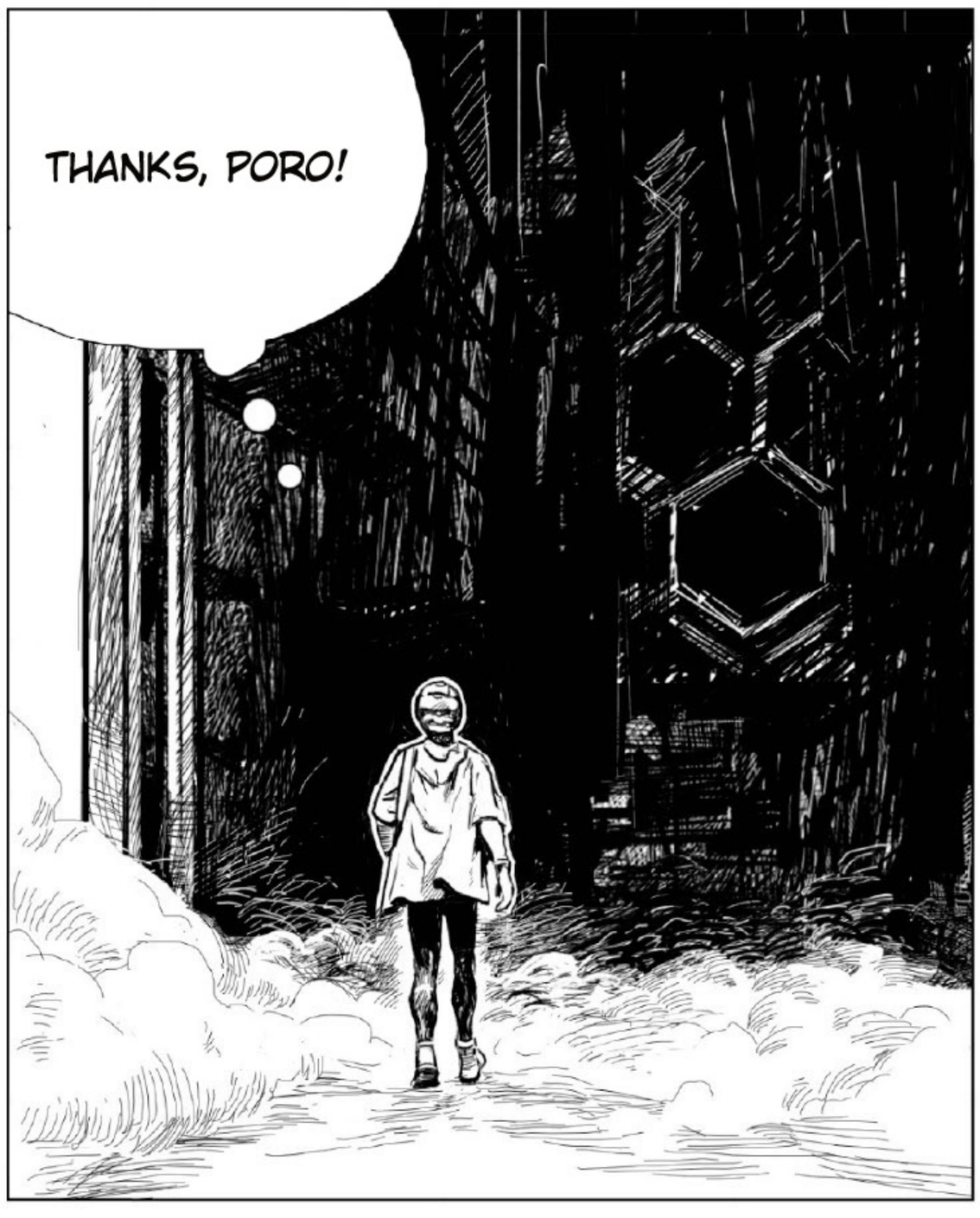
51

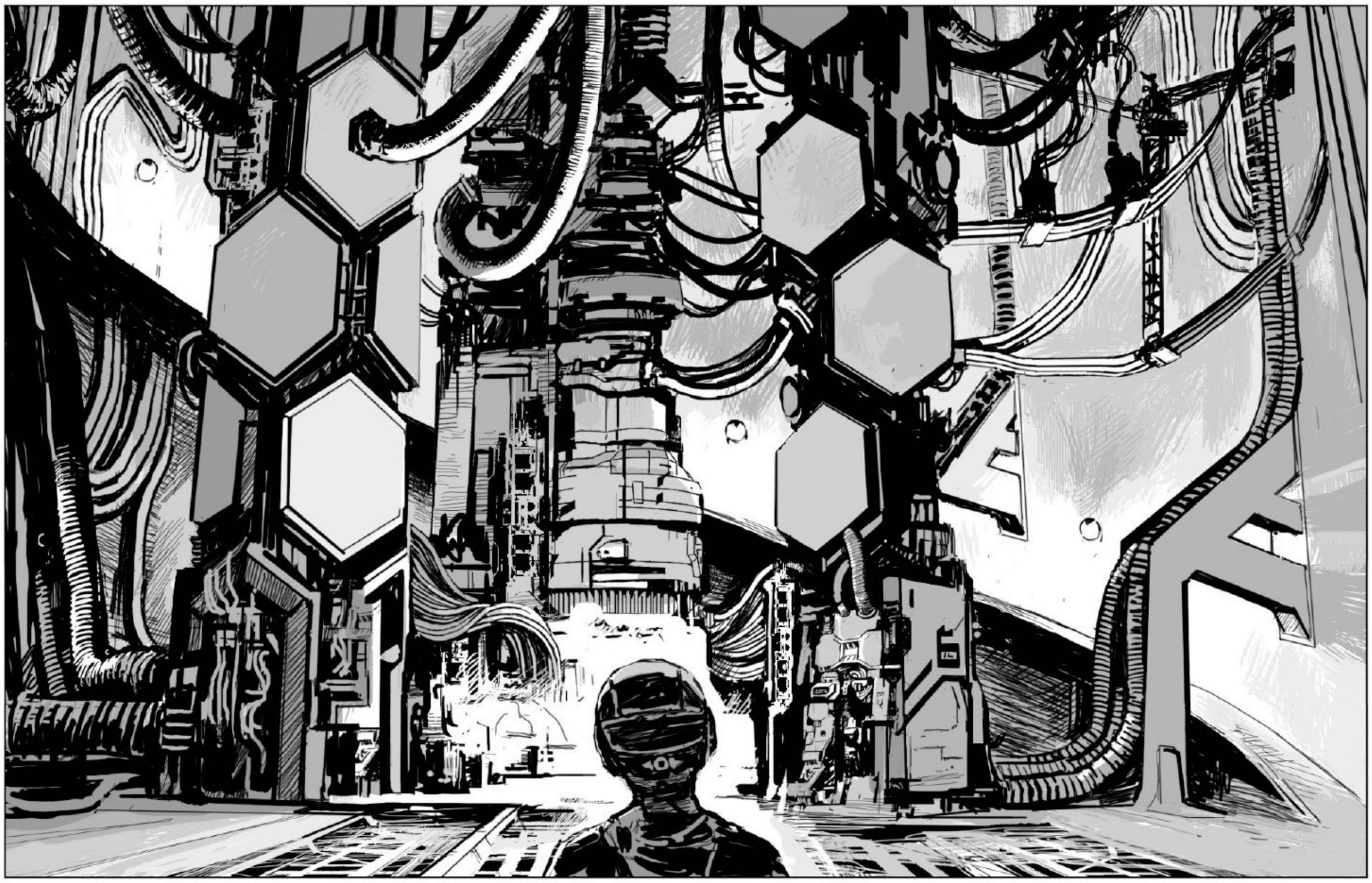
UNLESS...

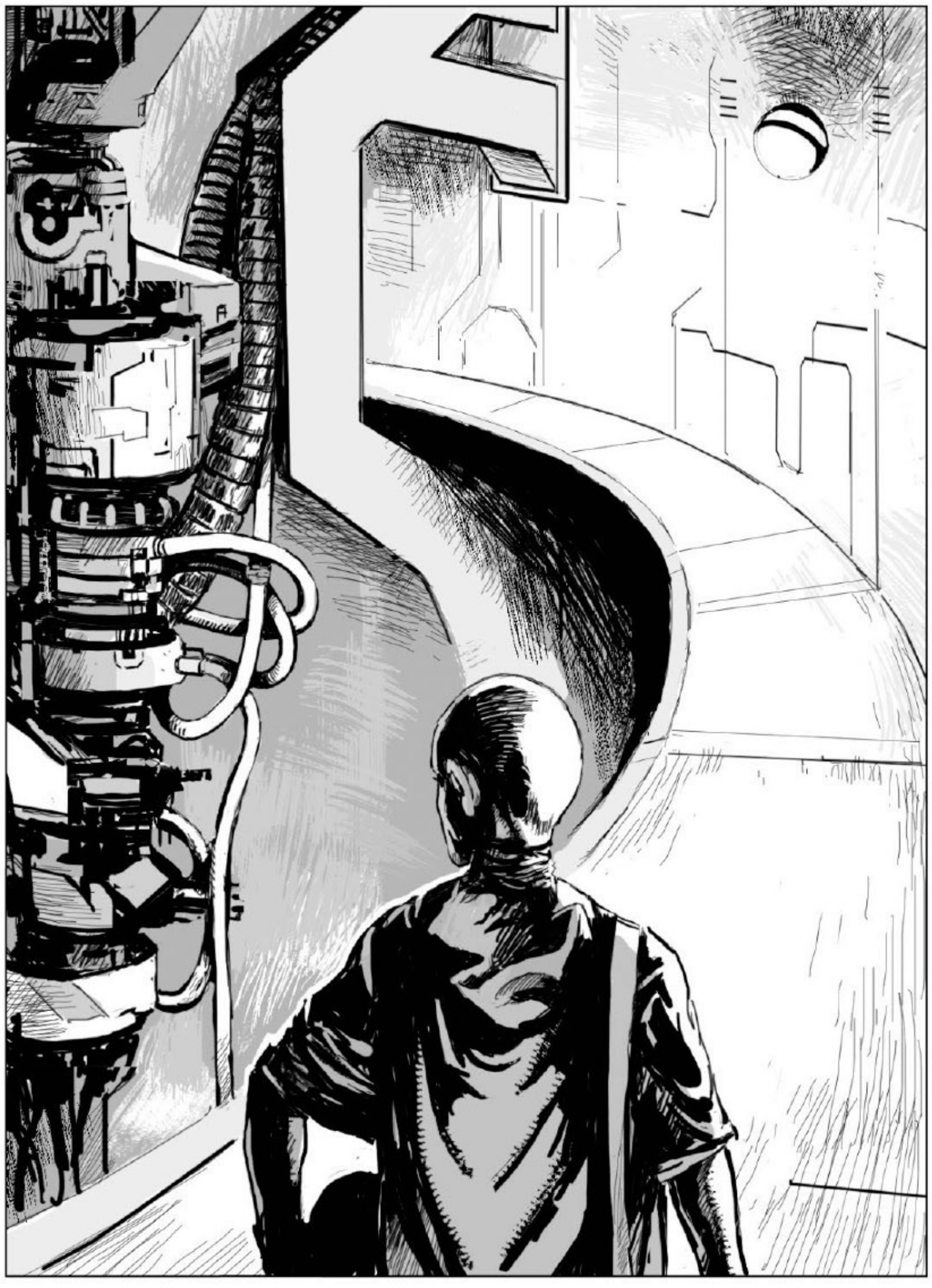

ZZZZZZZZZZZZ


WWOOMM

PSHHH
FSHHH
KA-SHH!!


THANKS, PORO!





THUD

SERIOUSLY, I DON'T GET ANY OF THIS TECHNOLOGY.

WHERE DID I PUT IT?

ALRIGHT, SO IF I PUSH THIS BUTTON I SHOULD BE TRANSMITTING.

IF I DIDN'T SCREW IT UP...

ERM...

HELLO?

IT'S LUPO, MY FRIENDS. I'M CALLING FROM A COMMS TOWER ON THE LEVEL 237 MESA.

IT'S BEEN A LITTLE WHILE SINCE I'VE BEEN ABLE TO MAKE A TRANSMISSION.

I'VE SPENT A LOT OF TIME IN THE BREACH RECENTLY...

BUT NOW I CAN GIVE YOU A LITTLE UPDATE ON OUR PLANS... PROJECT JANUS.

I'M NOT RECEIVING ANYTHING, SO THIS'LL BE A ONE-SIDED CONVERSATION... AS USUAL.

AS FOR THE TORANAS, NOTHING NEW ON THAT: NO-ONE I MET HAS BEEN ABLE TO TELL ME ANYTHING ABOUT THEM.

IT SEEMS THAT INTELLIGENT SPECIES ARE IN THE MINORITY ON THIS SHIP, SINCE THE AWAKENING...

ON REFLECTION, IT'S NOT SHOCKING. ON NOAH'S ARK, WHO COULD SAY WHAT'S GOING ON, APART FROM NOAH HIMSELF?

THAT'S WHY WE MUST OPEN THOSE TORANAS... TO GET SOME ANSWERS FROM NOAH!

ON THE SUBJECT OF THE NOMADS, I HAVEN'T MADE MUCH PROGRESS EITHER. I HAVE CONFIRMATION THAT THEY PASS THROUGH THE TORANAS, IN BOTH DIRECTIONS, AND FIGHT THE SHADOWS.

BUT THEY ARE NOT DRONES. THEY SEEM... ORGANIC. BUT THE DESCRIPTIONS ARE MUDDLED... NONE OF THEM AGREE.

EVERYONE I MET, HUMAN OR OTHERWISE, KNOWS NOTHING...

... THEY'VE ALL RETURNED TO THE STONE AGE. OR ITS EXTRATERRESTRIAL EQUIVALENT.

WHICH IS FUNNY SINCE THERE AREN'T EVEN ANY STONES IN THIS PLACE.

WELL, THE OEDS IN OUR CASE...

FIRST, I'LL USE THE TORANAS TO REJOIN YOU. THEN WE'LL GO SEE THOSE FUCKERS. ALL THREE OF US TOGETHER.

NOW I WILL HEAD FOR THE TORANA ON LEVEL 237. ACCORDING TO MY INFORMATION, THERE COULD BE HUMANS IN THE AREA.

WITH A LITTLE LUCK THEY'RE NOT TOO DEVOLVED. AND WITH A LOT OF LUCK, THE TORANA WILL STILL BE THERE AND THEY'LL KNOW HOW TO OPEN IT.

I'LL KEEP YOU UPDATED, MY FRIENDS. JENNA, TAKE CARE OF PORO, AND MAKE HIM GET SOME REST.

I KNOW HOW EASILY HE GETS TIRED IN HIS OLD AGE.

THIS IS LUPO, SIGNING OFF.

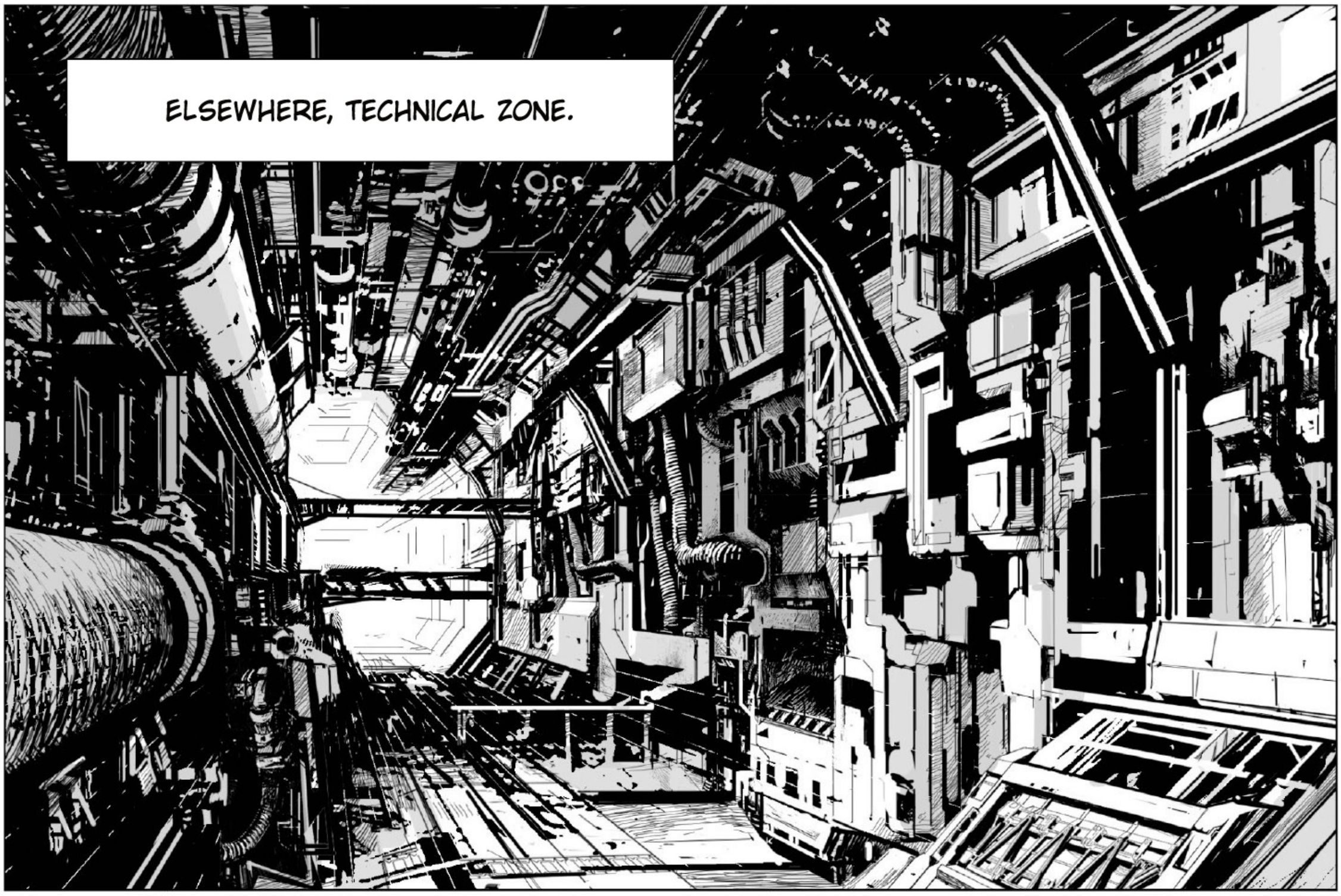
YOU WANT TO COME WITH ME? IT'S QUITE A WAY!

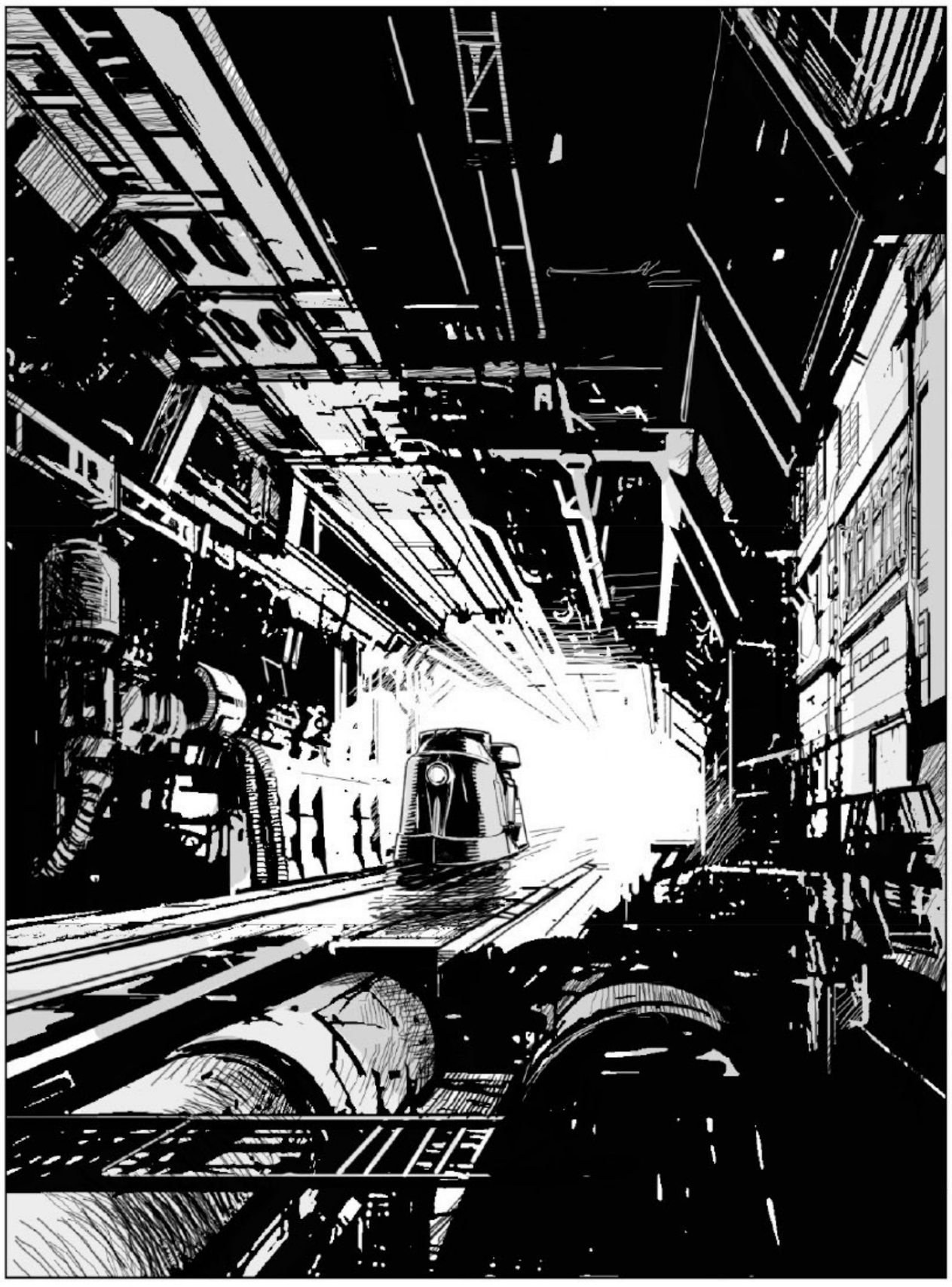
YIK

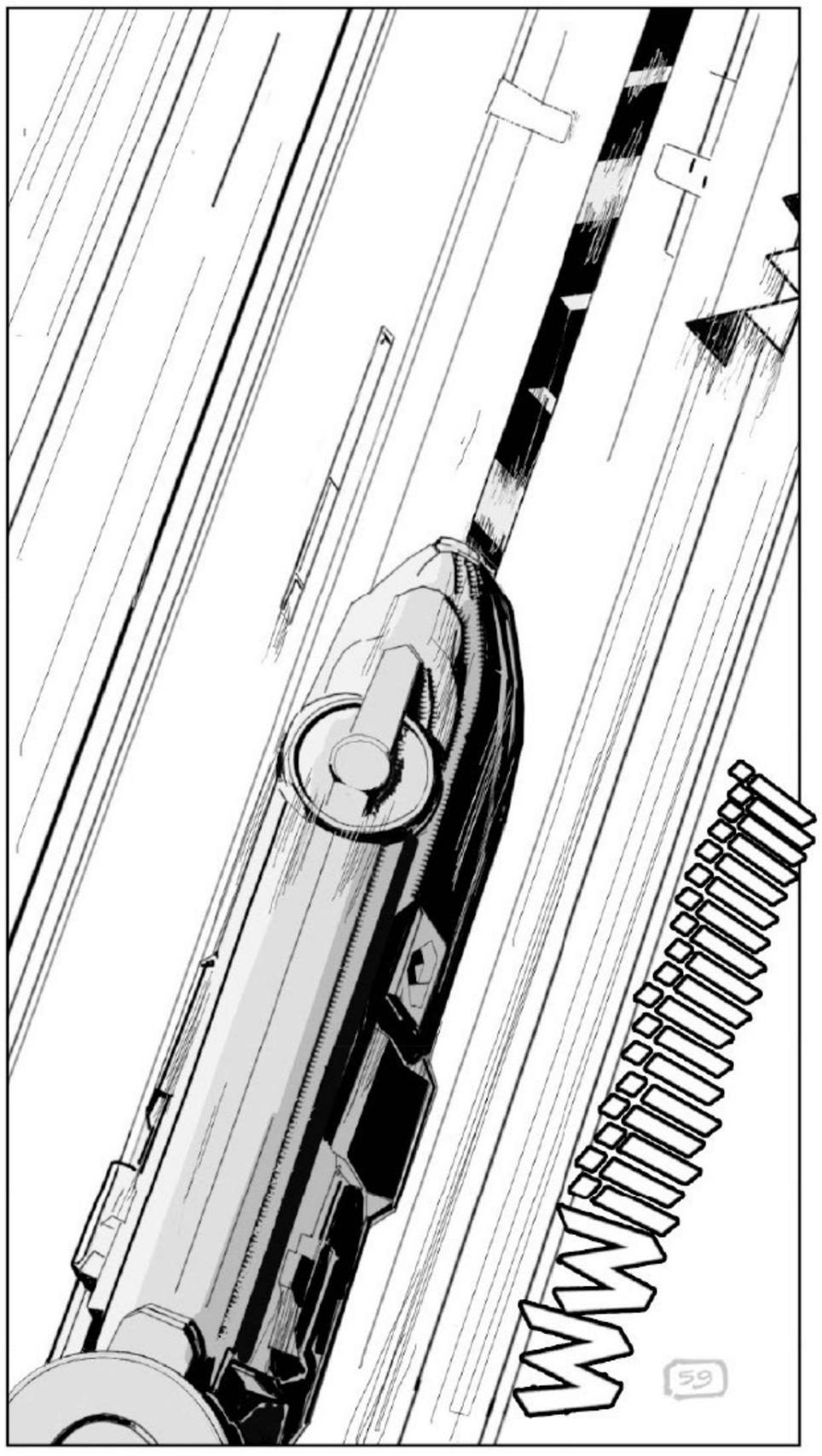
THANKS FOR WAITING FOR ME!

YIK?

ALRIGHT, I'LL TAKE THAT AS A YES.


ELSEWHERE, TECHNICAL ZONE.

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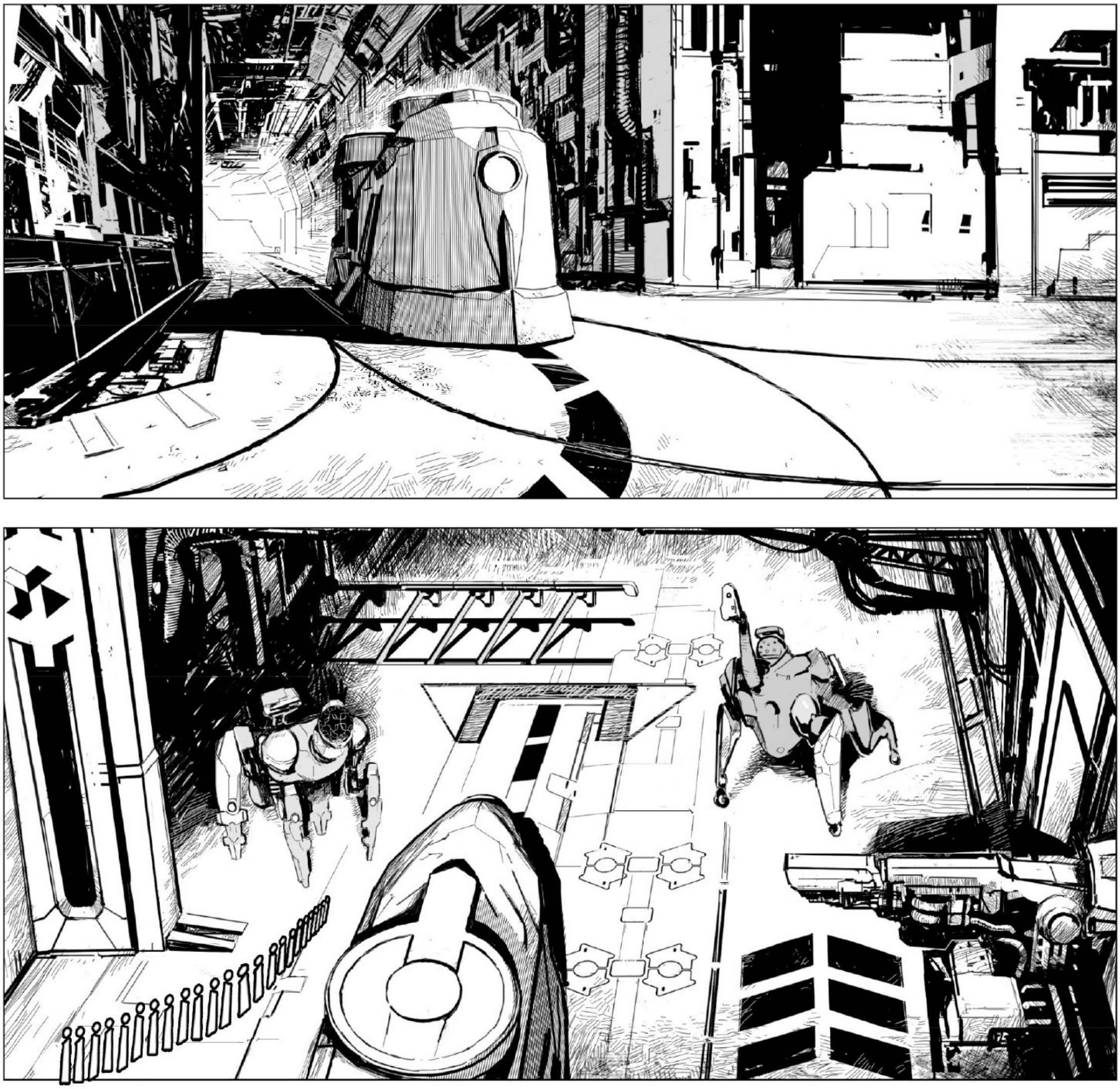
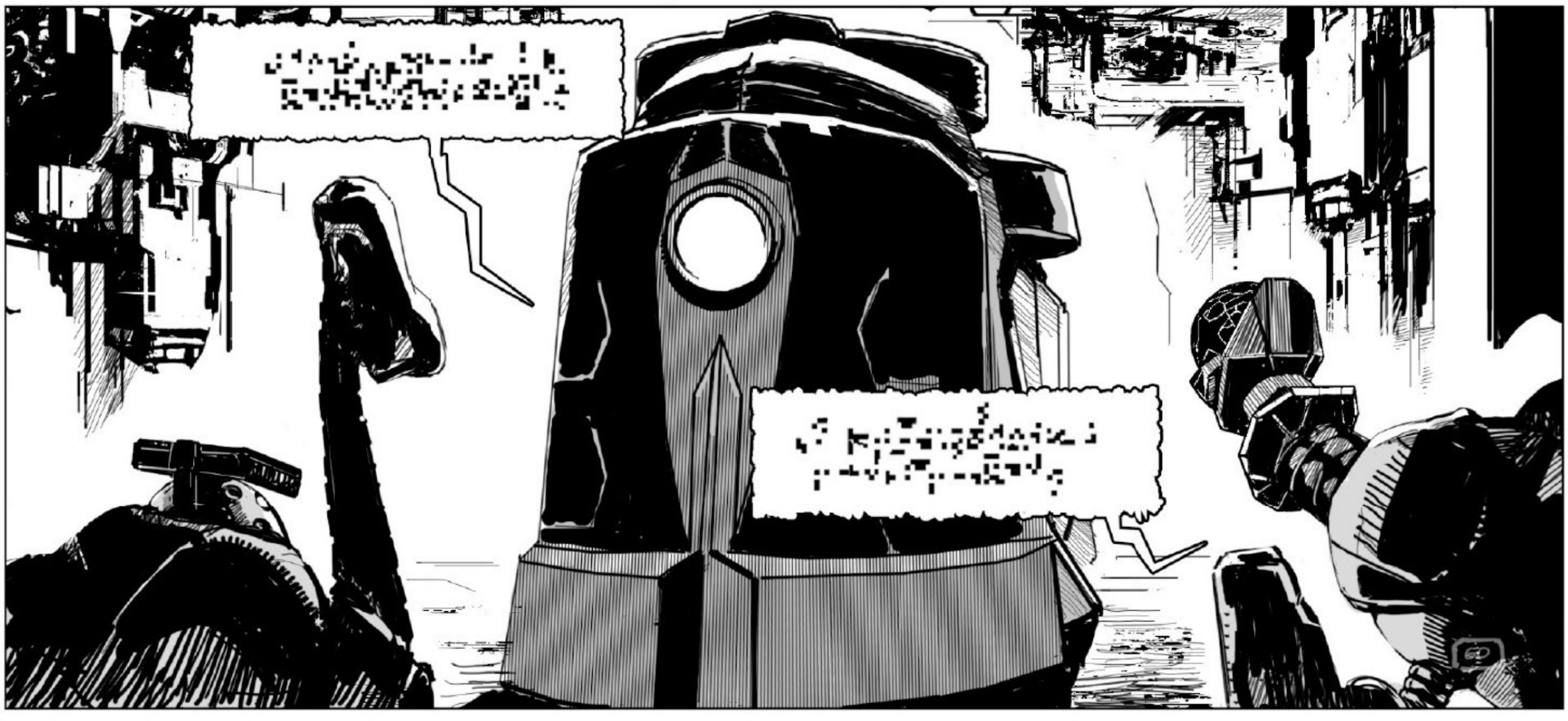




KLANG

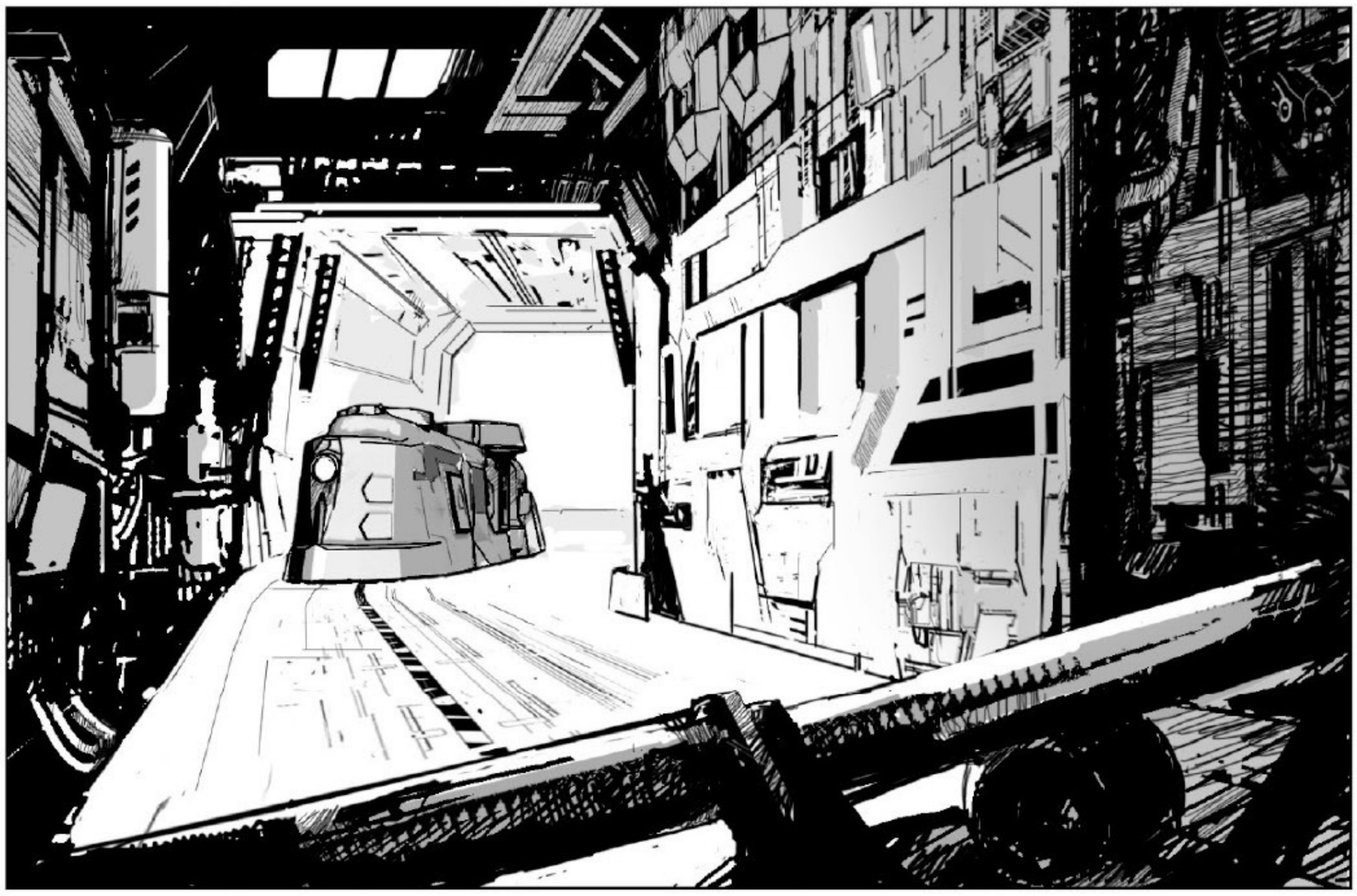
...

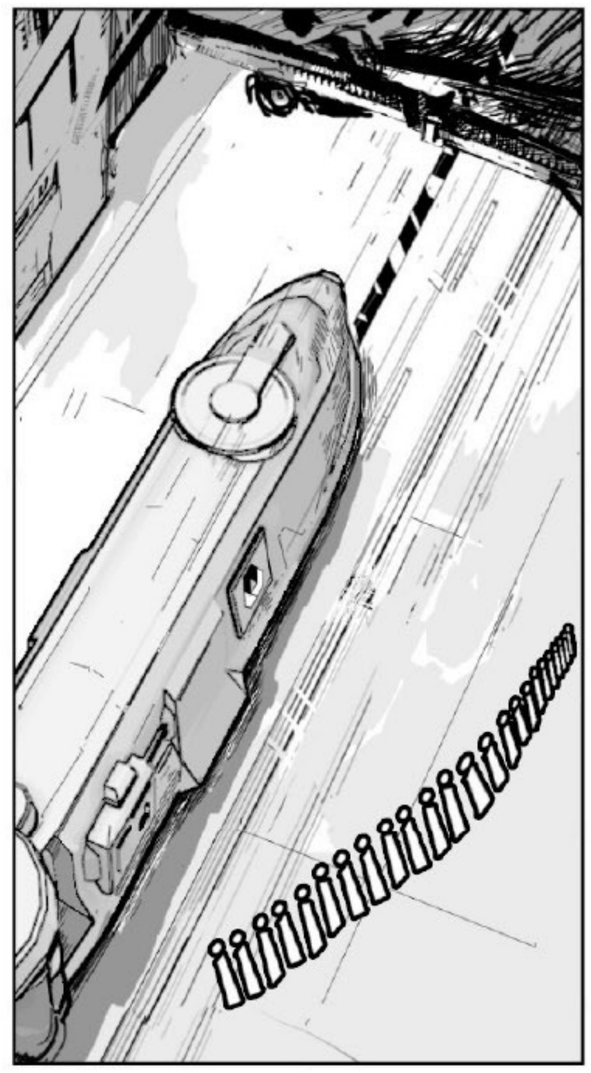
FSHHHH

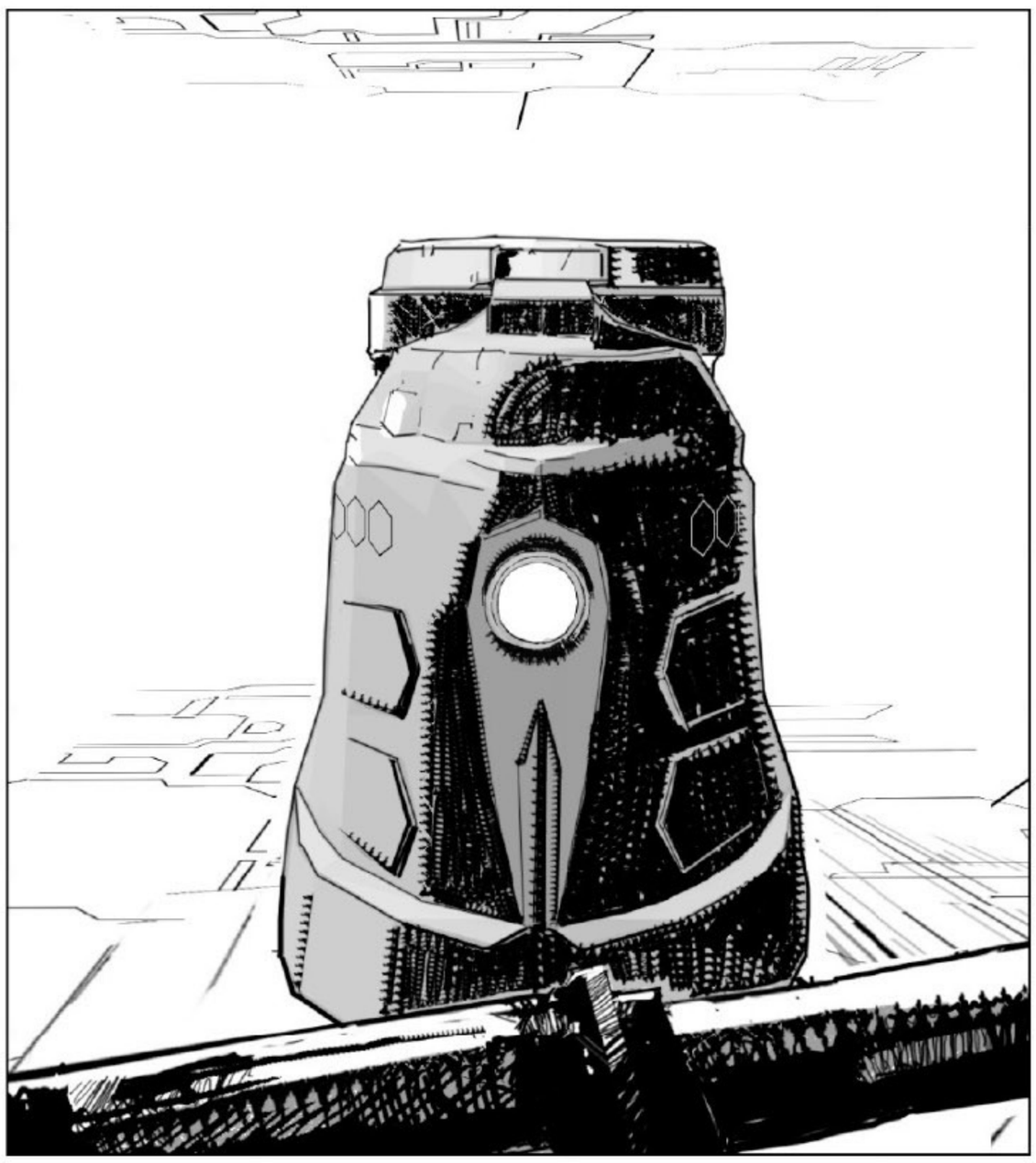
PSHHH

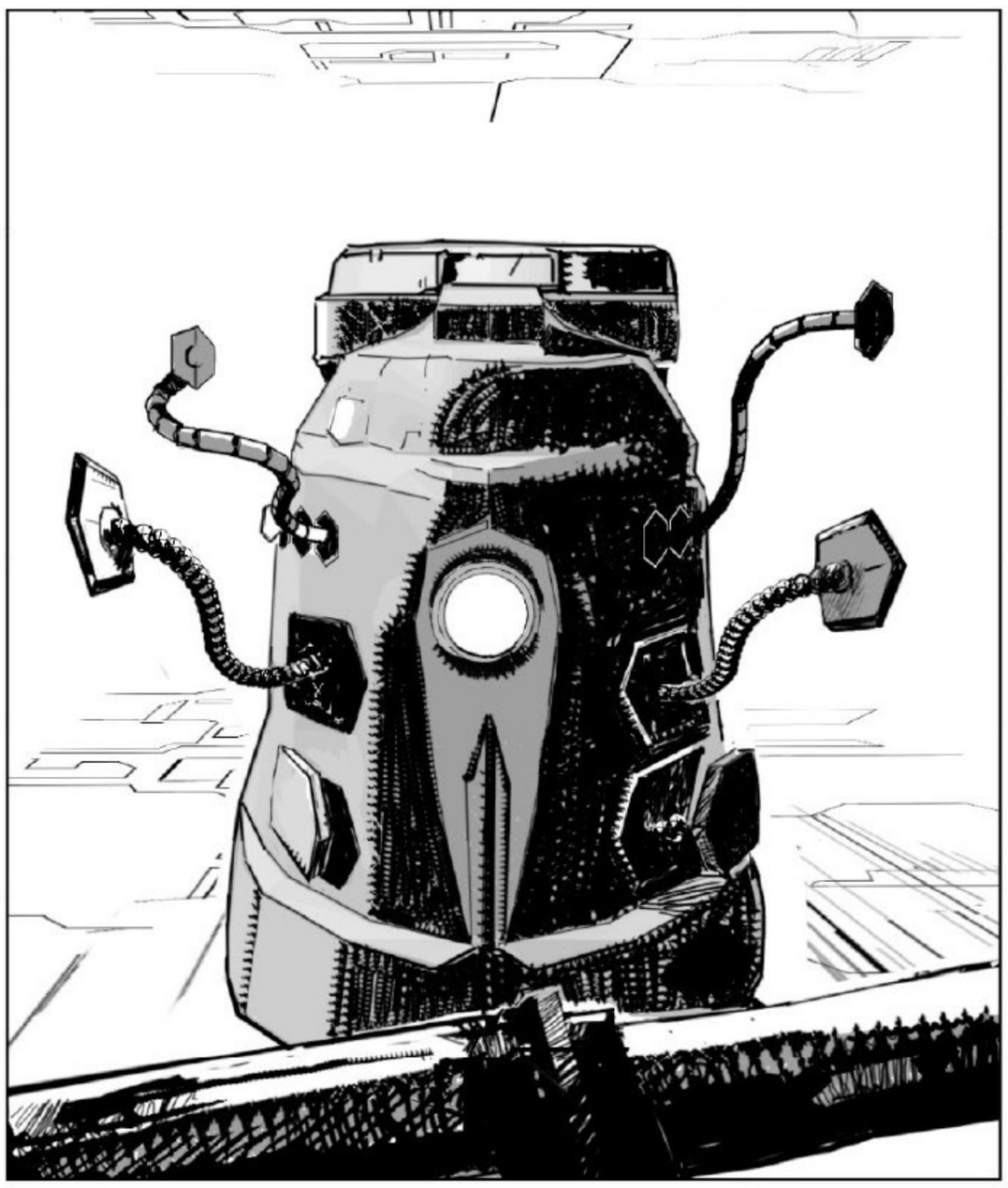
WWiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii

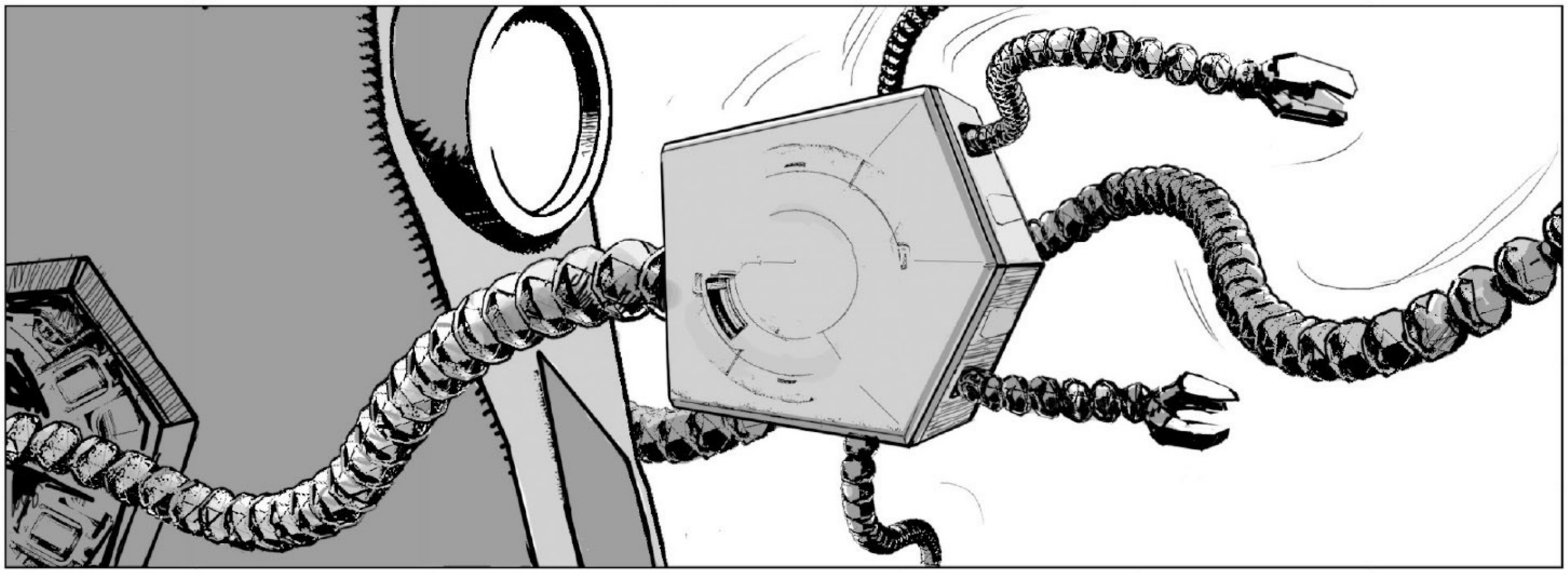
HISSSH!

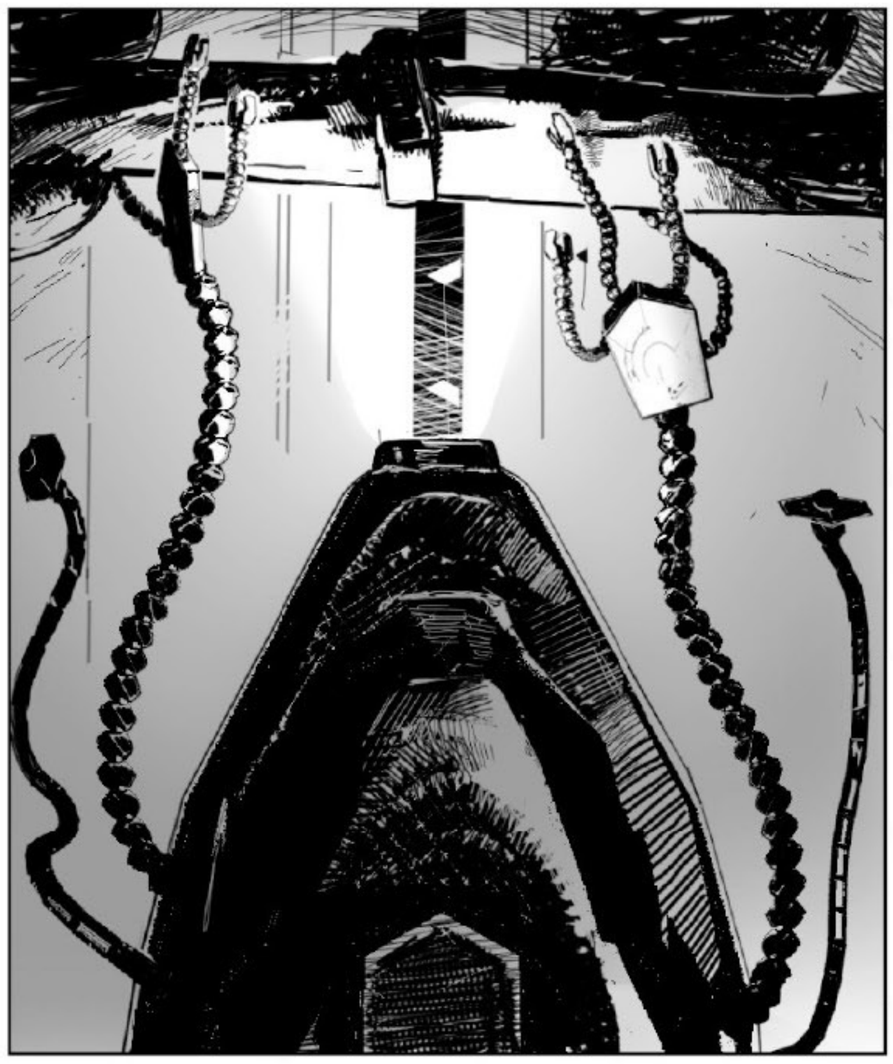


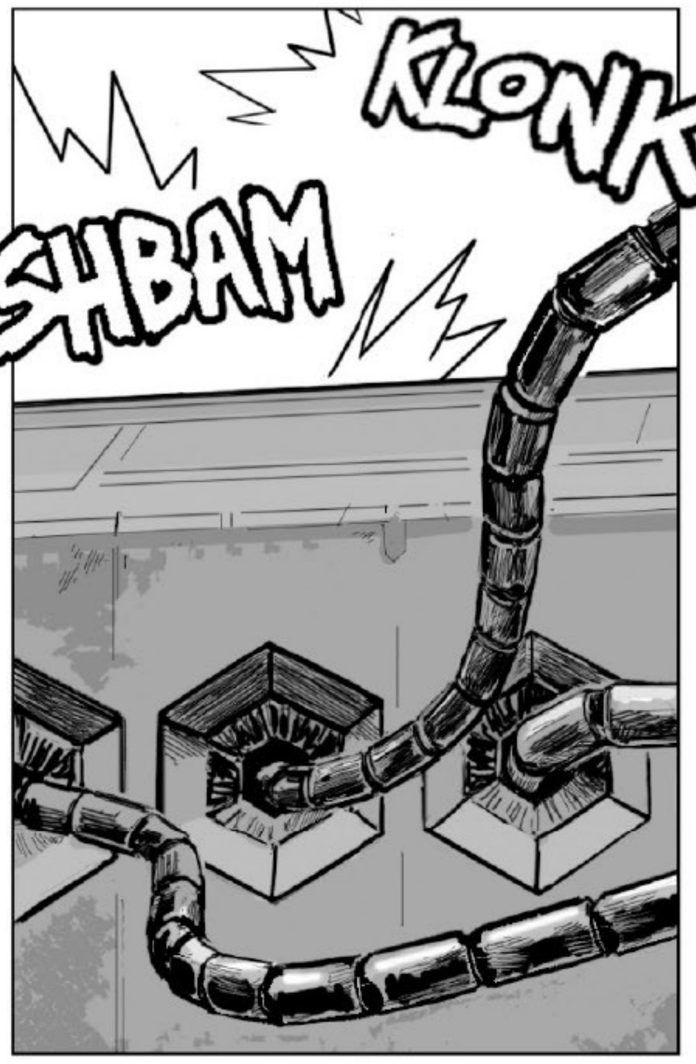


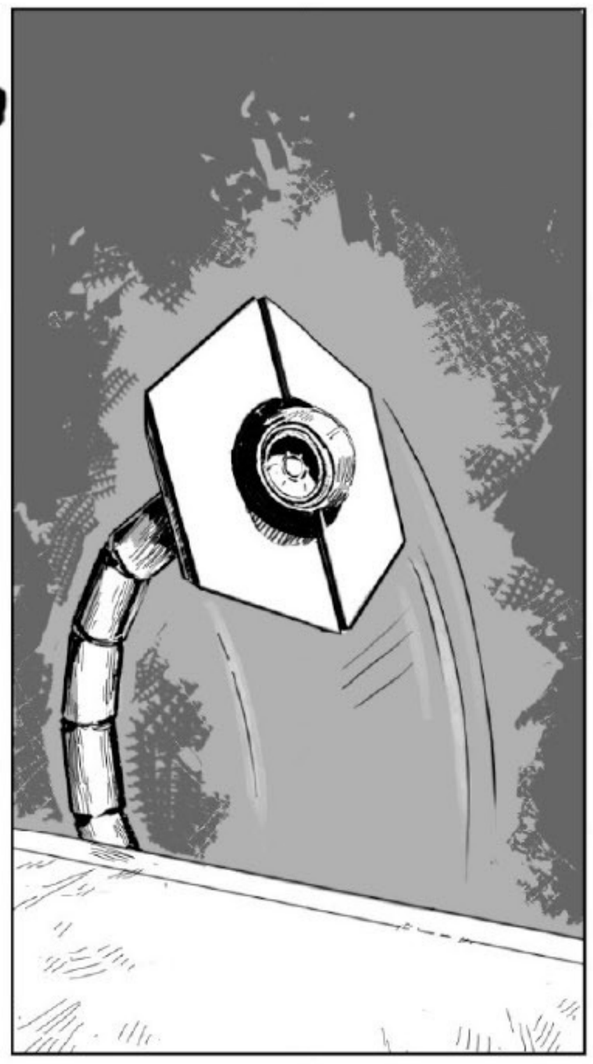




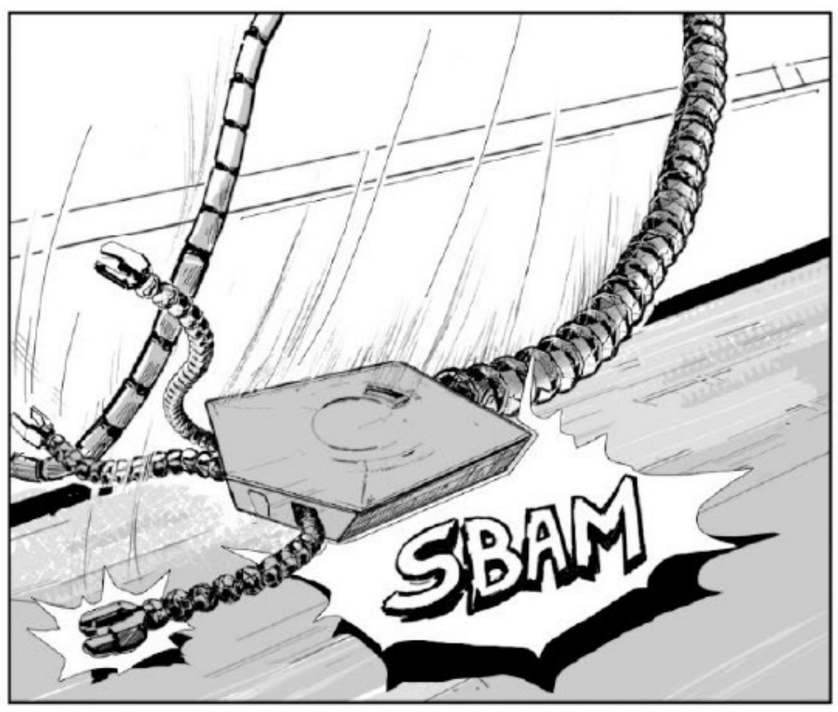


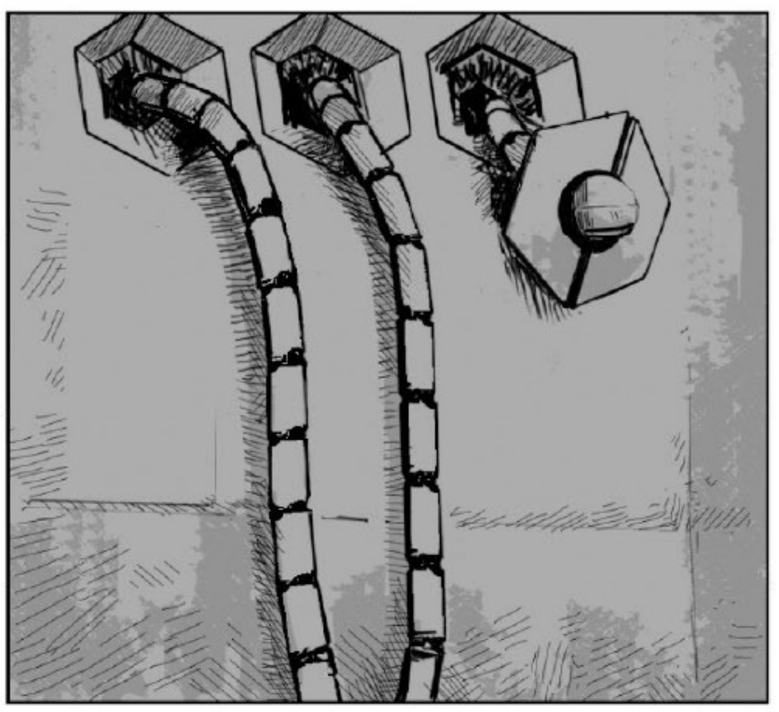


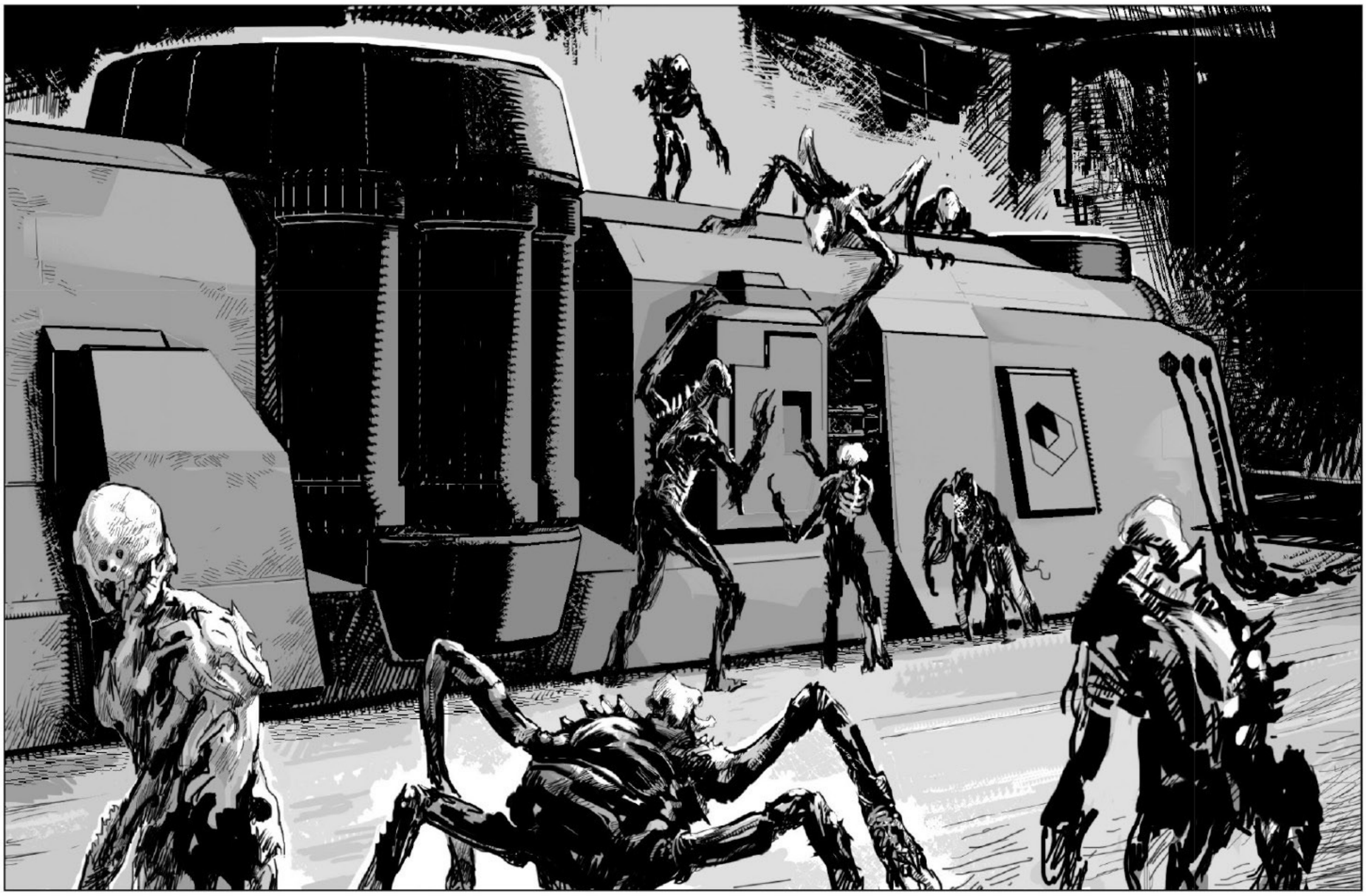

KLONK
SHBAM

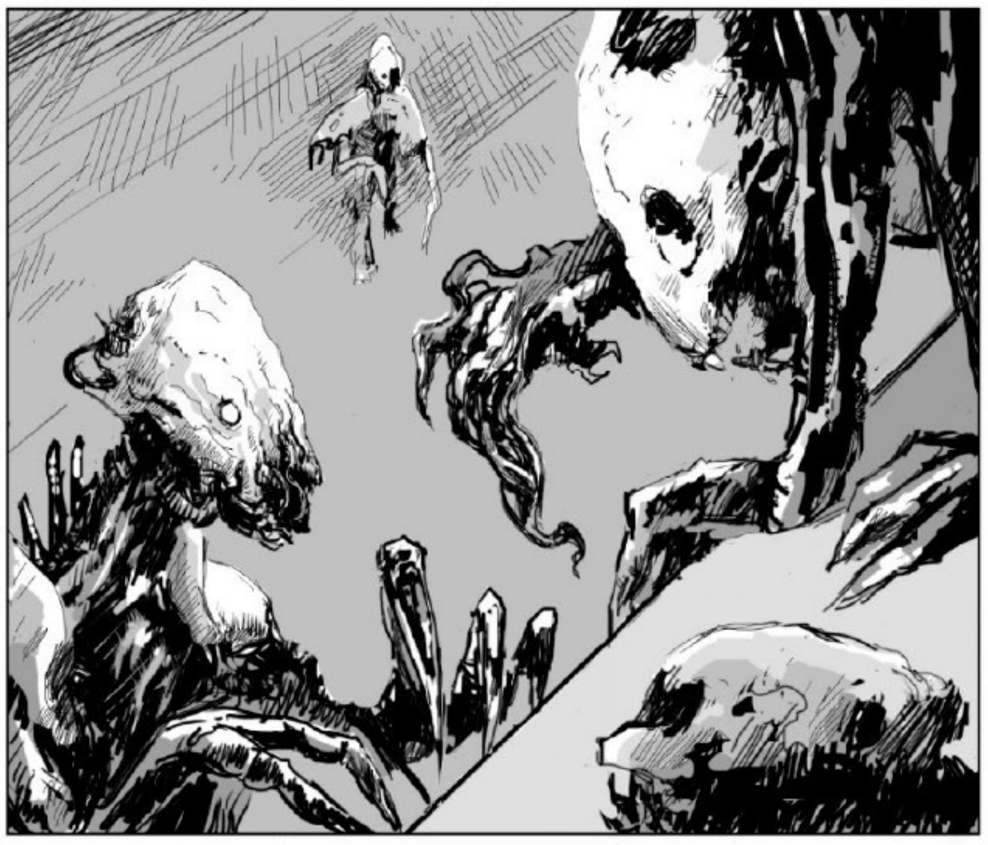


DZZZ
DZiiiiiiT


SBAM







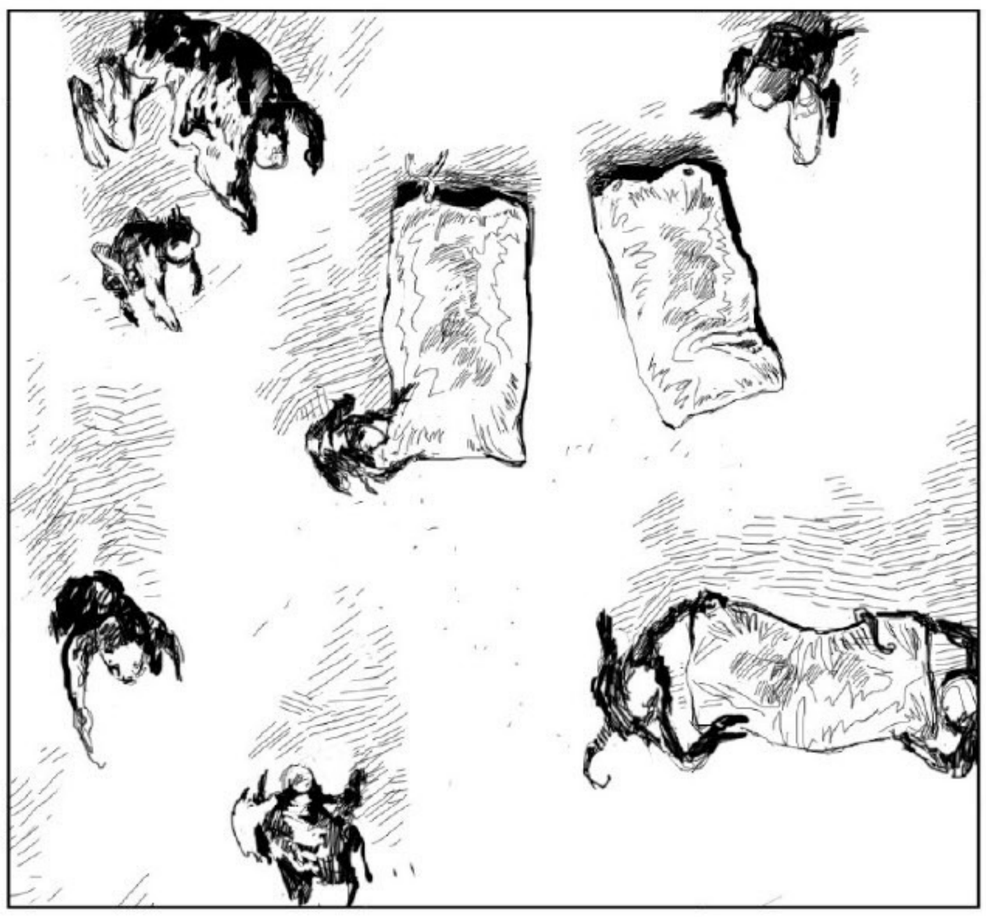
CRRRRRRR

KRASH

KRAK
THUD

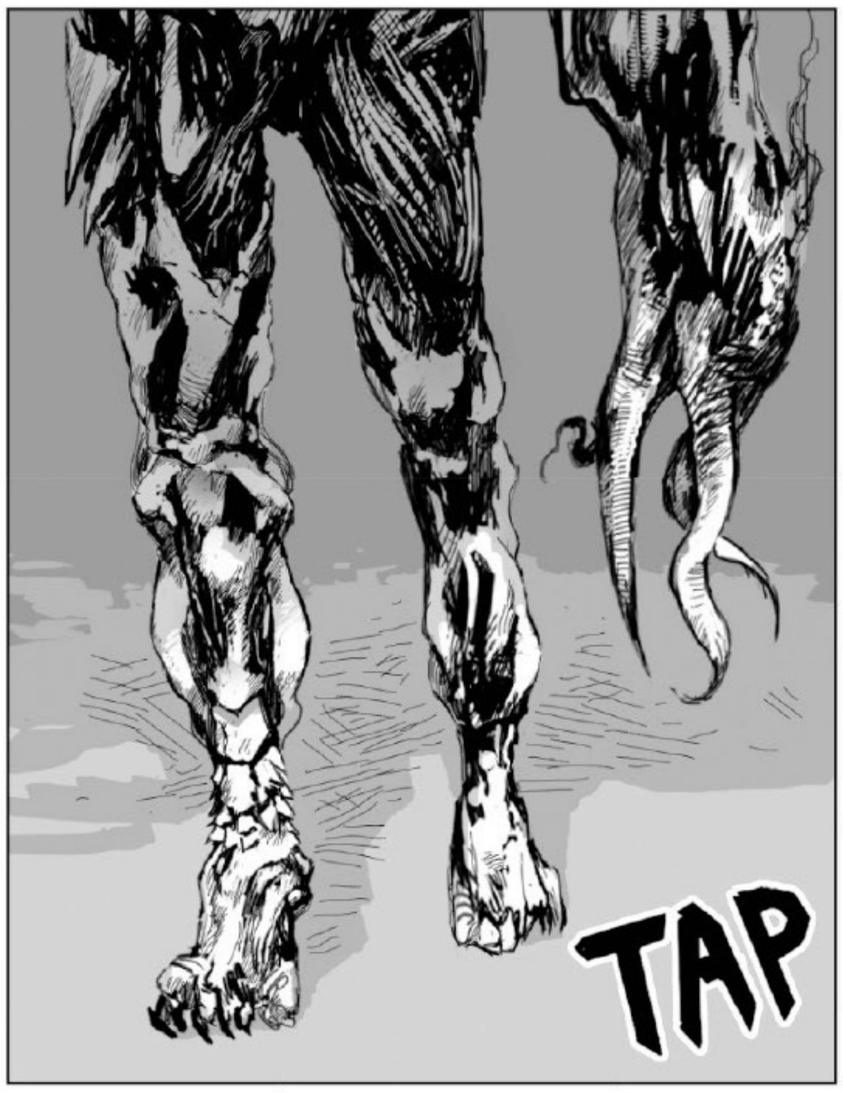
FSHHH
PSHHHii

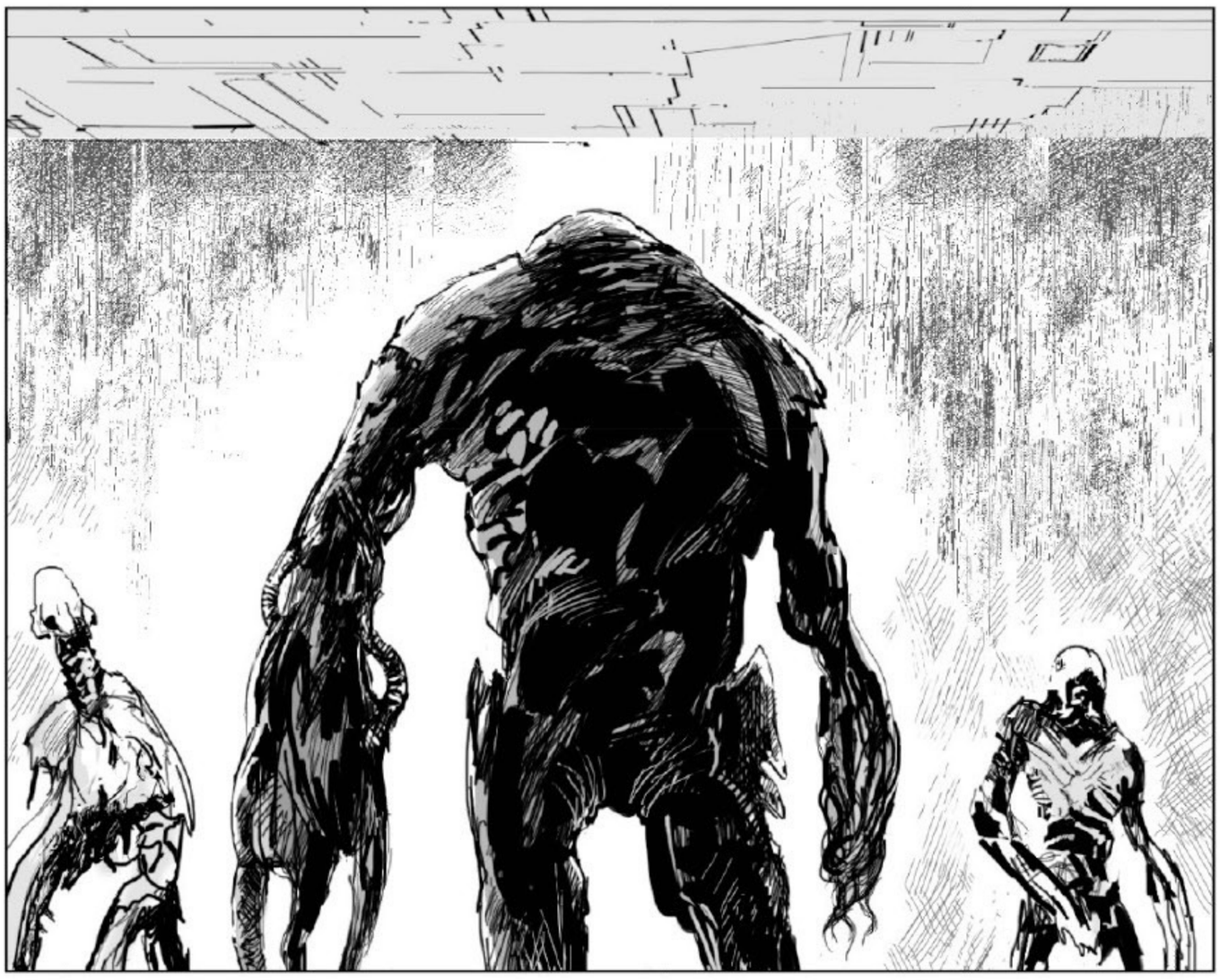
WUSHHH
WUSHHH



RRIPPPP

SPLASH


TAP



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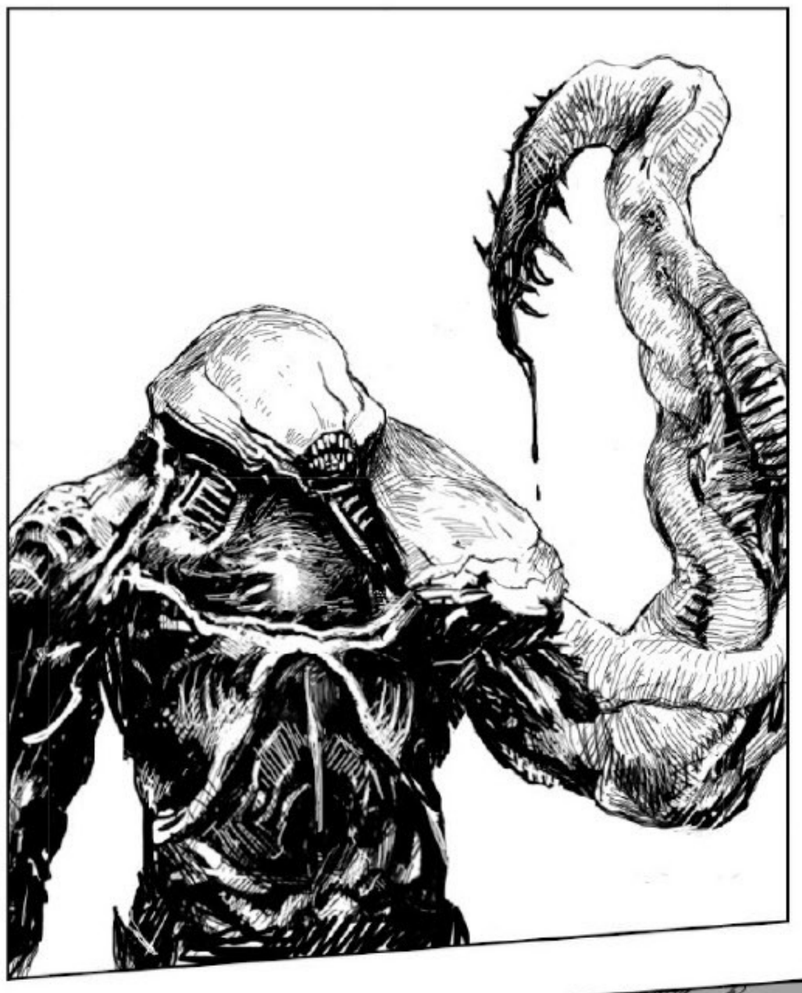
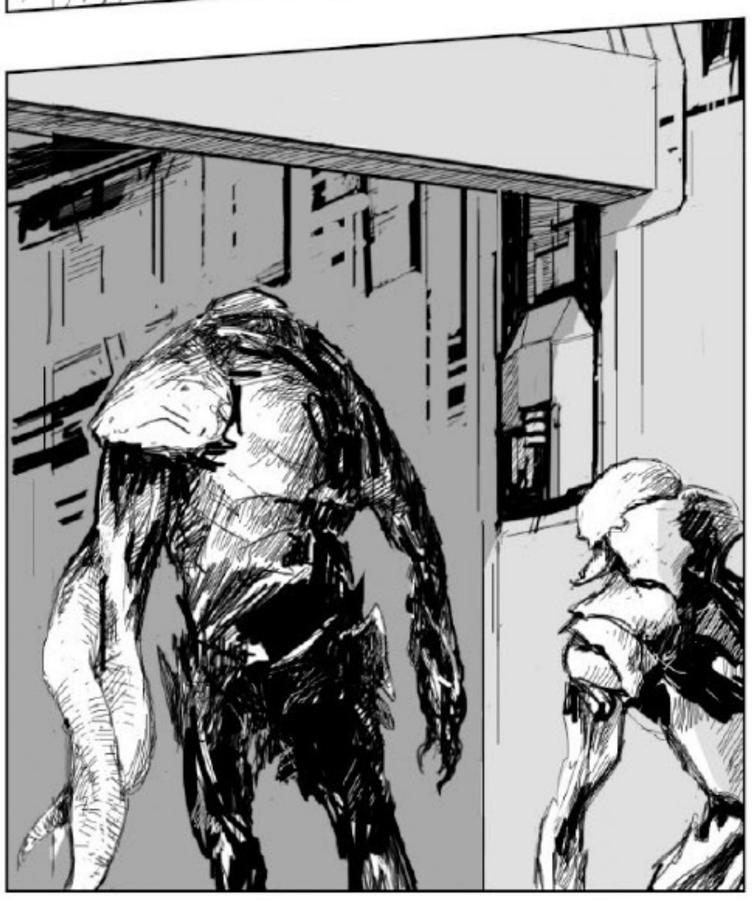
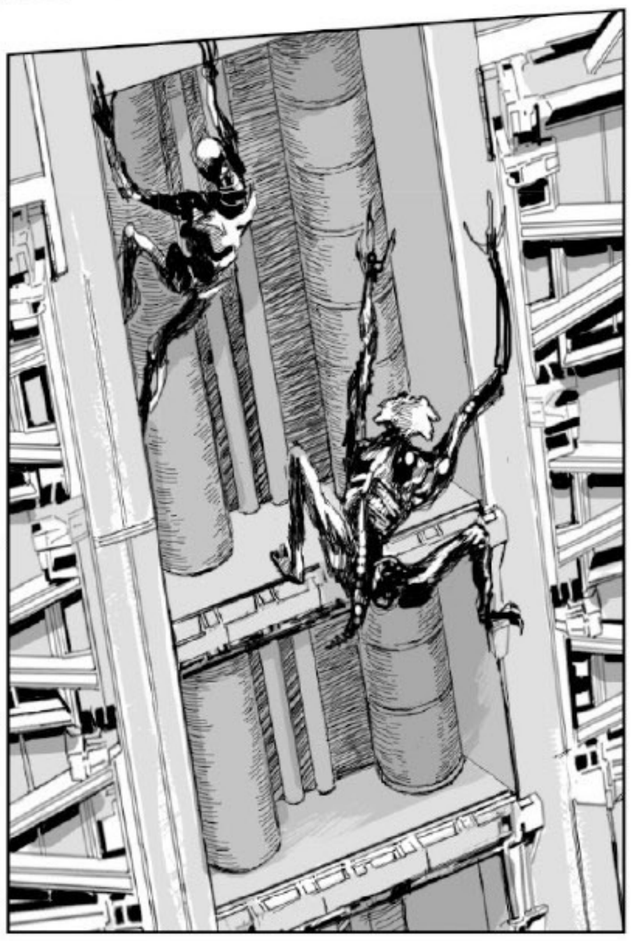
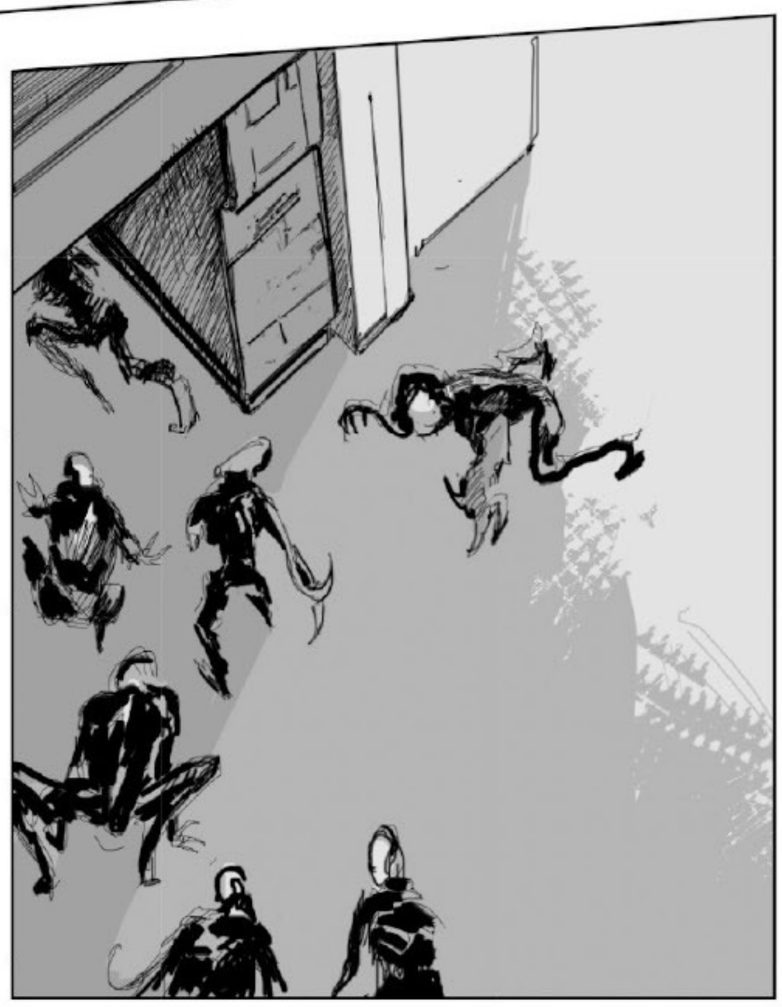
TIP

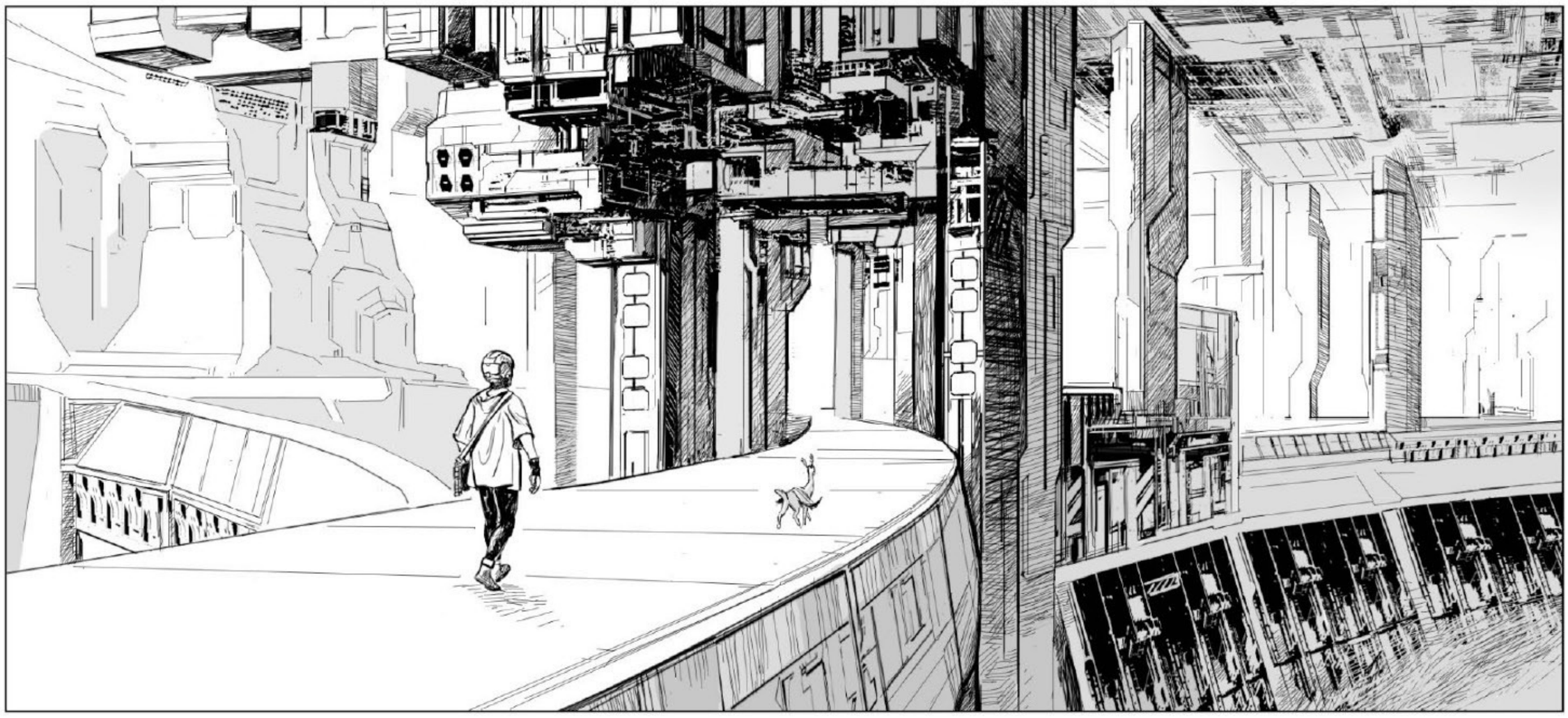
SLASH
KRii

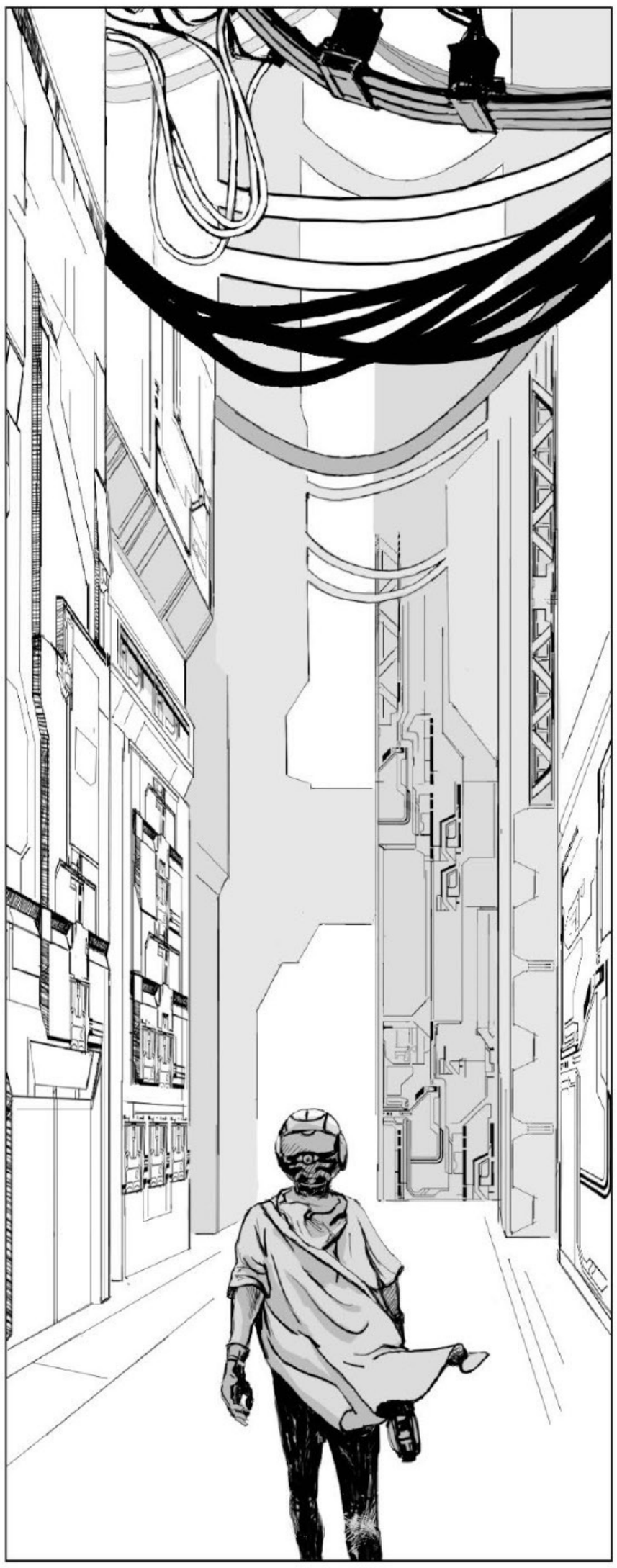


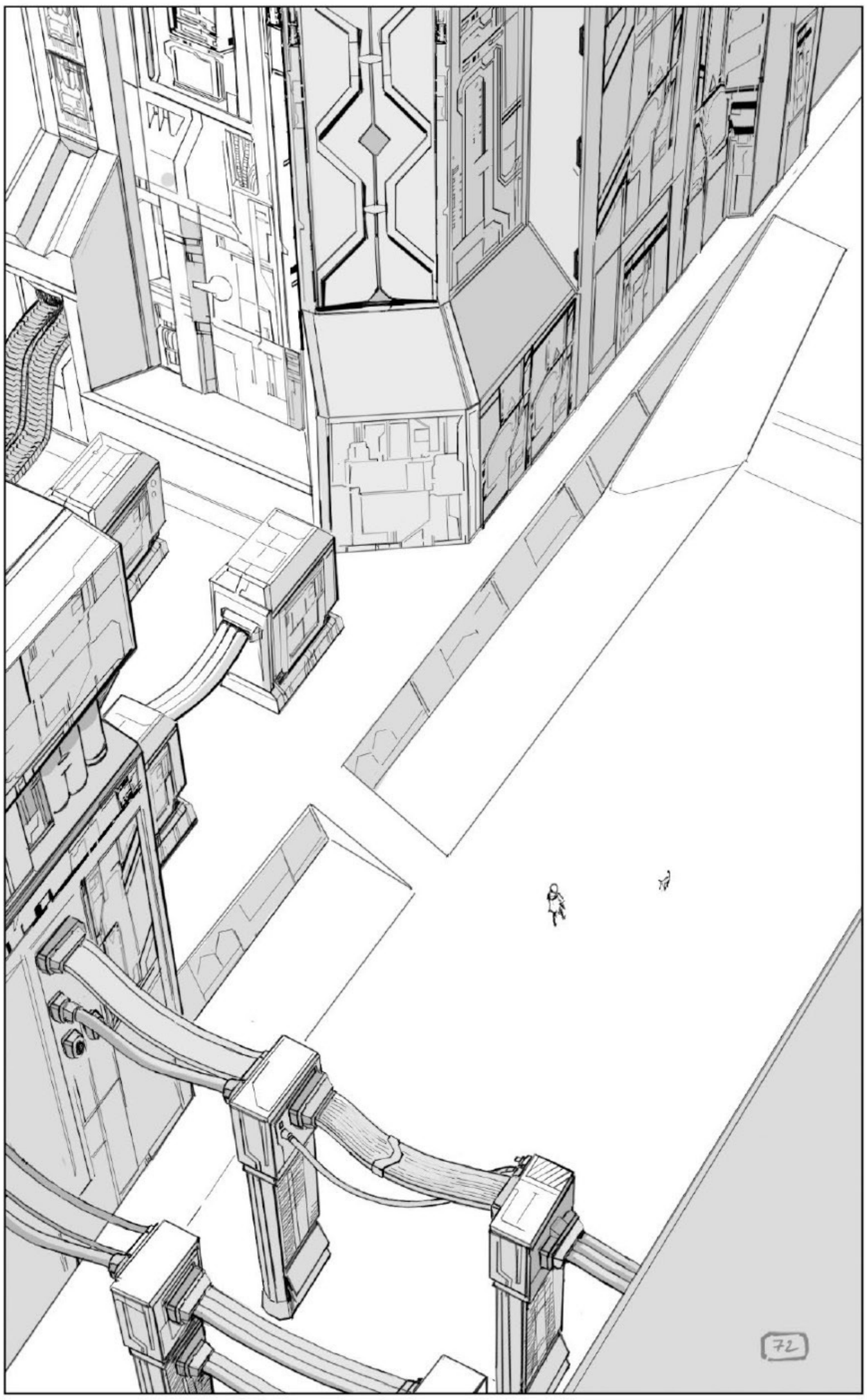











72

A...
A SHADOW!

WHAT
THE HELL'S
IT DOING
THERE?

WHAT ARE THOSE GROWTHS? IS THAT HOW THEY COMMUNICATE?

IN ANY CASE, I NEED TO GET OUT OF HERE RIGHT NOW...

I DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT MONSTER USED TO LOOK LIKE, BUT IT SURE LOOKED FAST...

I DON'T THINK IT HEARD ME... I SHOULD BE SAFE AROUND THIS...

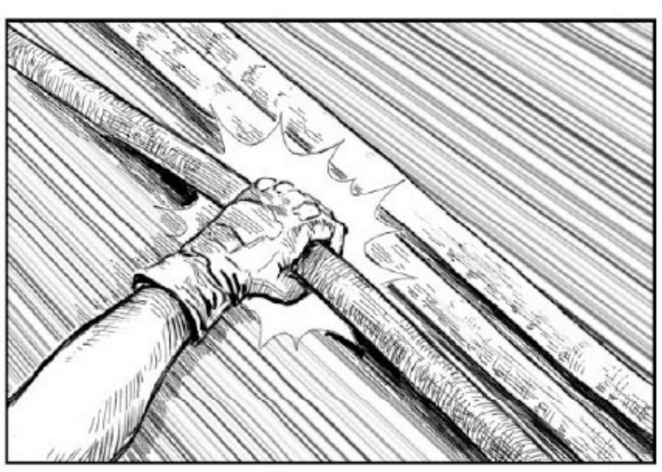
THUD

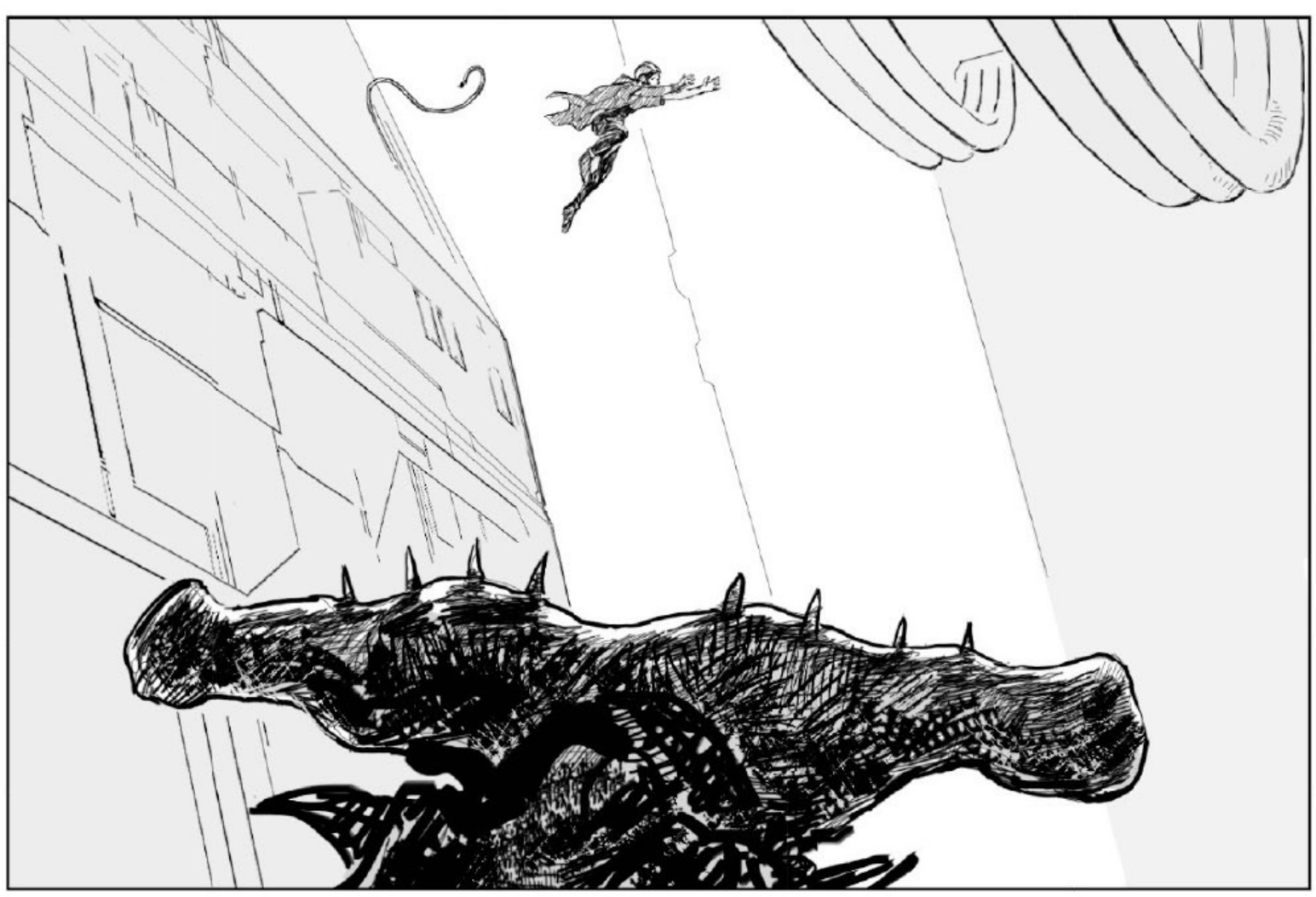
!

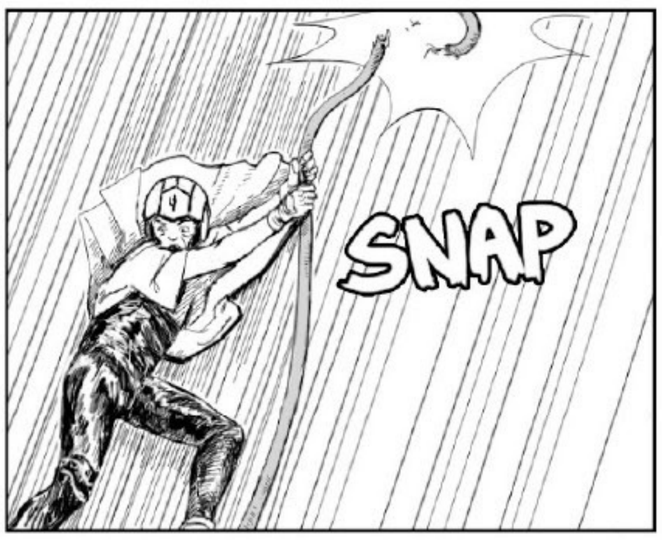
WHACK

BAM

GRRRRR






SNAP

UMPF

HH

HH

HH

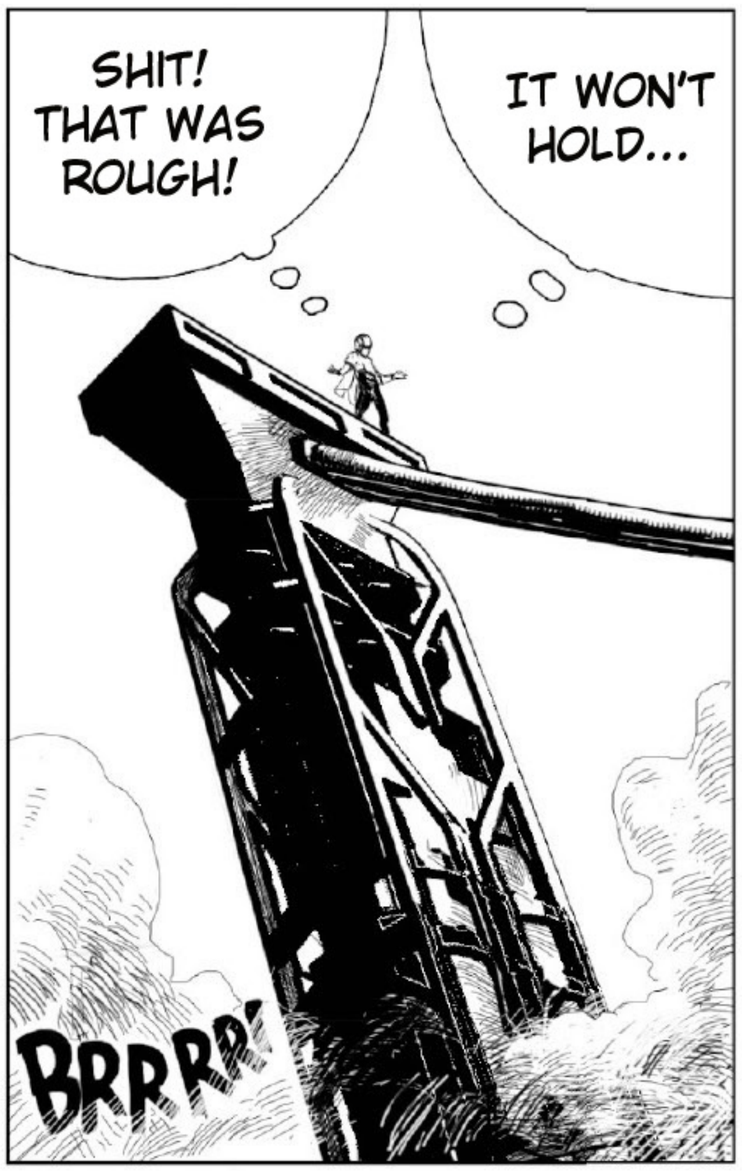
WHAT NOW?

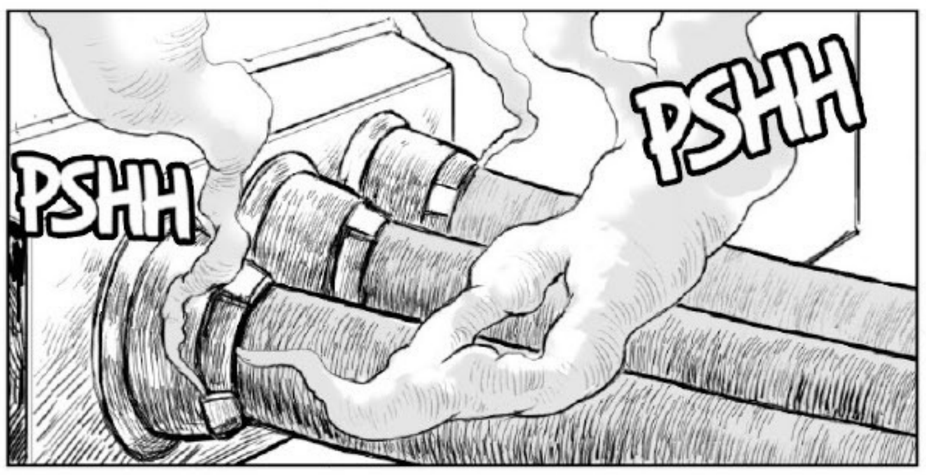
TRAPPED! WELL PLAYED, LUPO!

IT LOOKS PISSED OFF! WHAT...

BOLOM BOLOM BOL

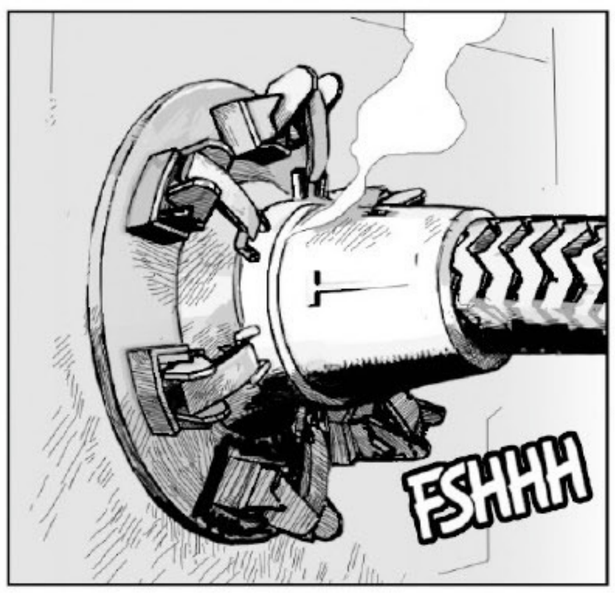
BOM


SHIT! THAT WAS ROUGH!
IT WON'T HOLD...
BRRRR!

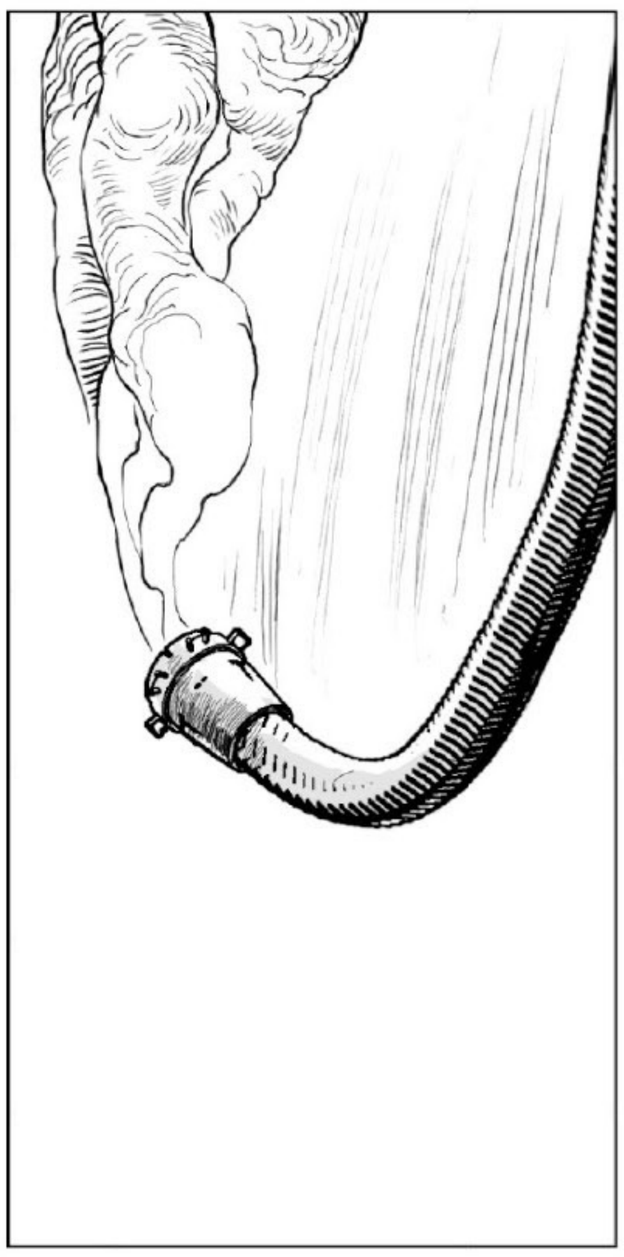

PSHH
PSHH

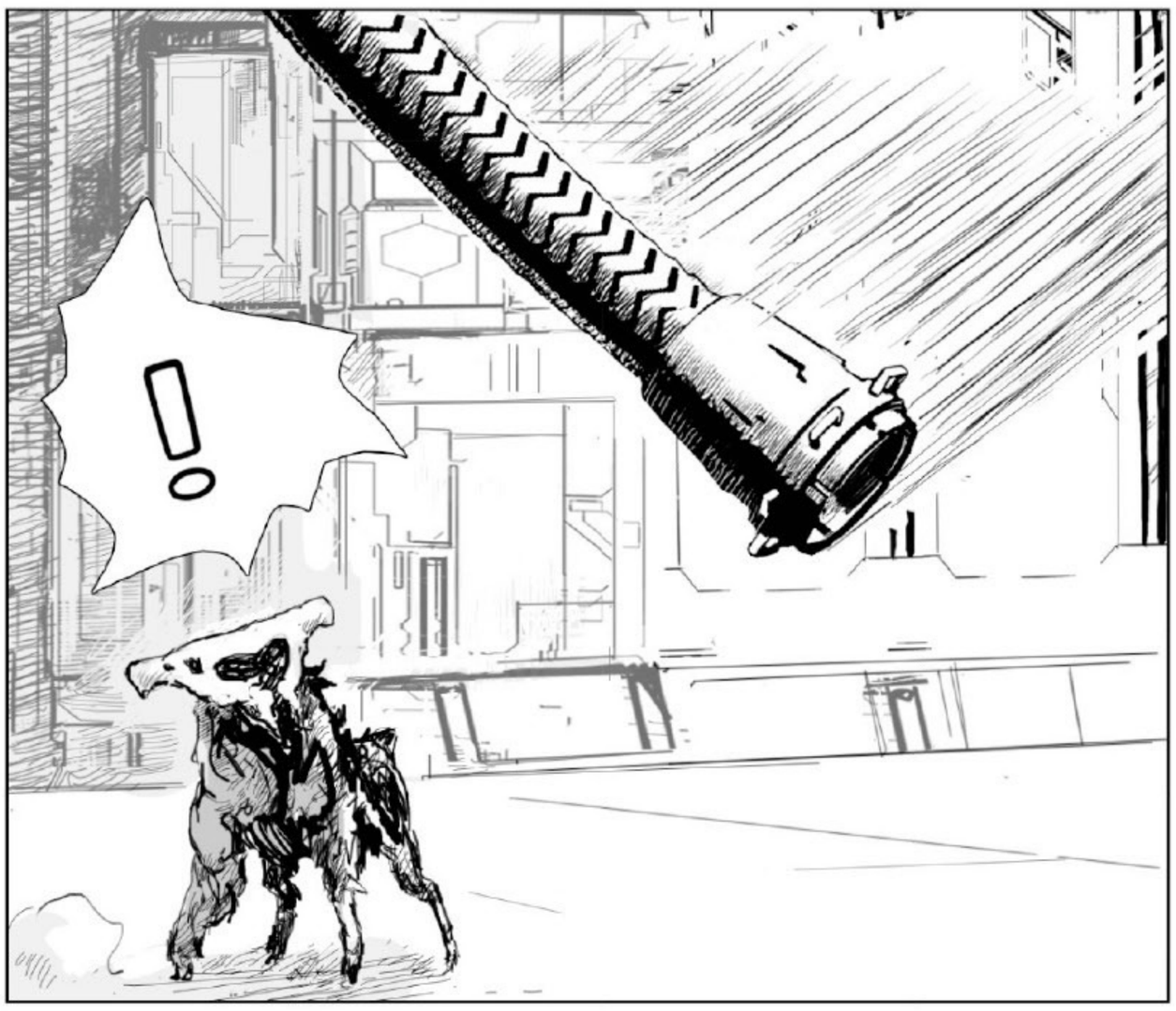
BREUM
FSH
?

CLAC
FSH
PSH


FSHHH

CLAC
CLAC
CLAC

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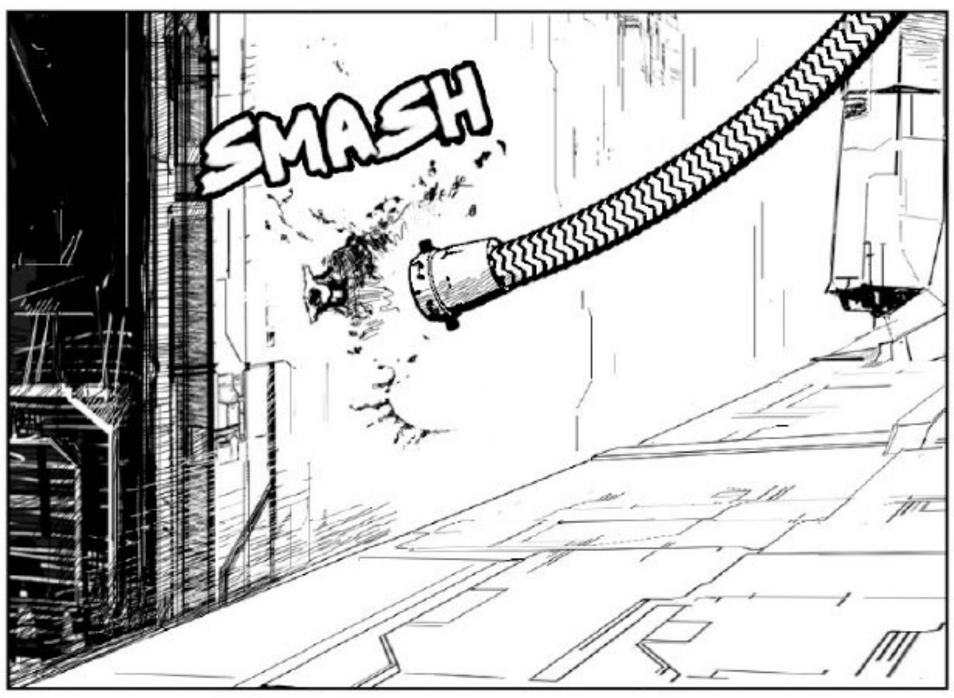
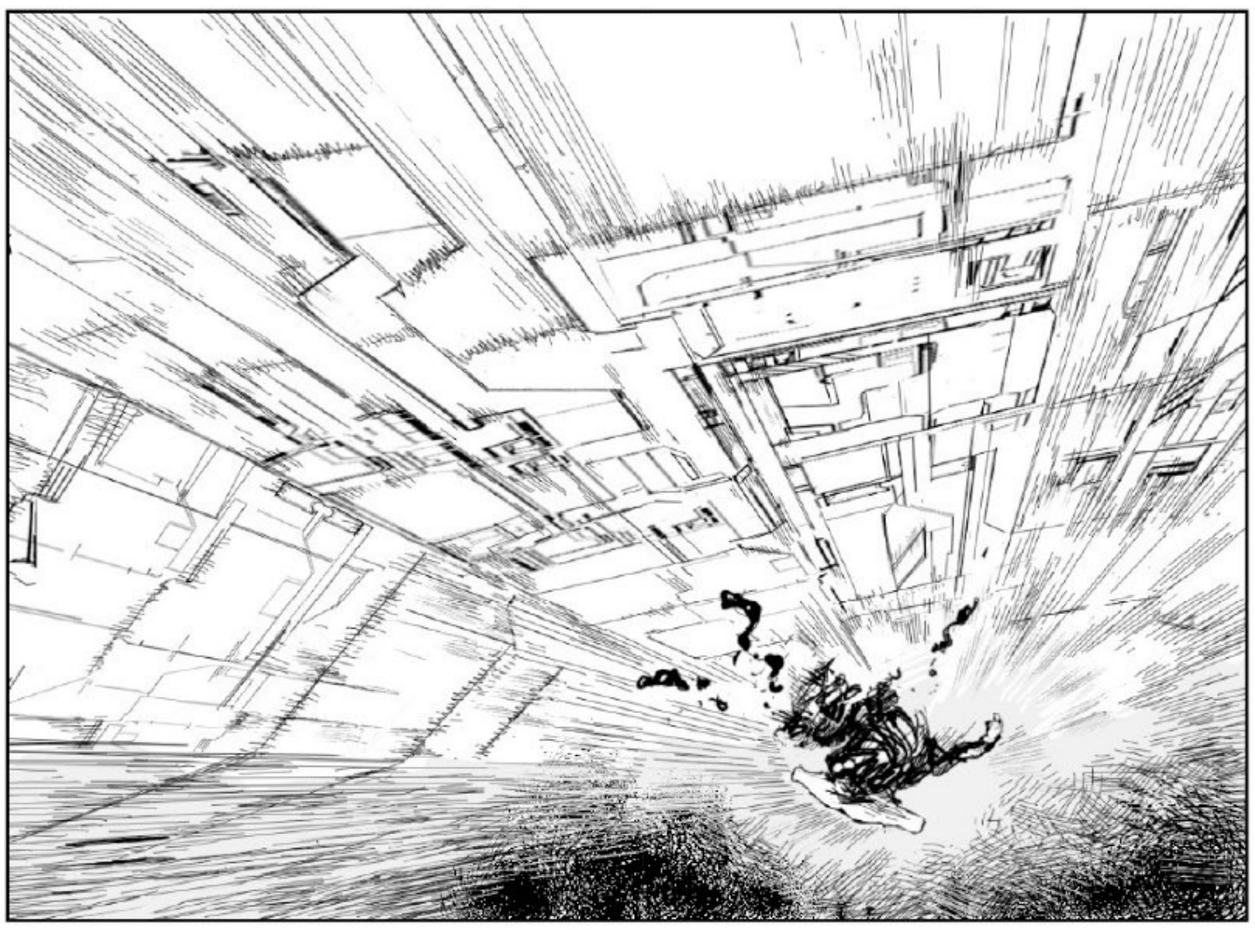
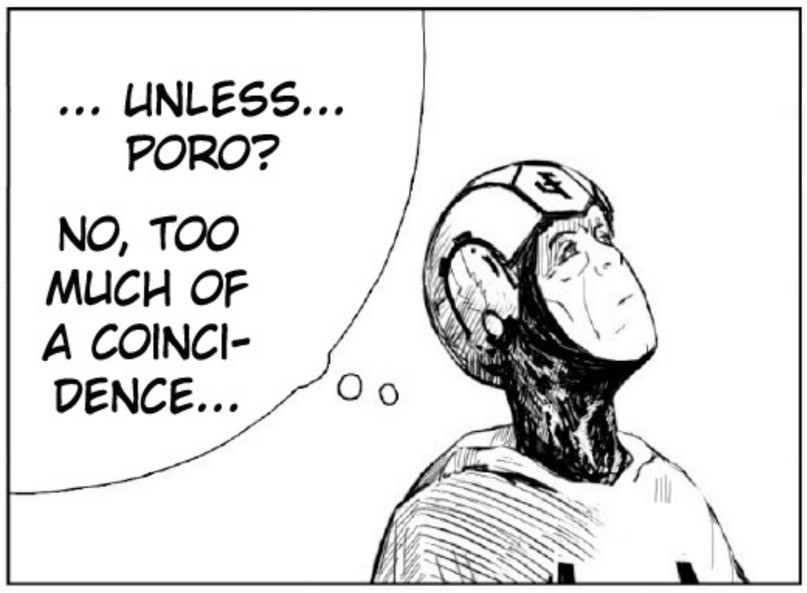

SMASH

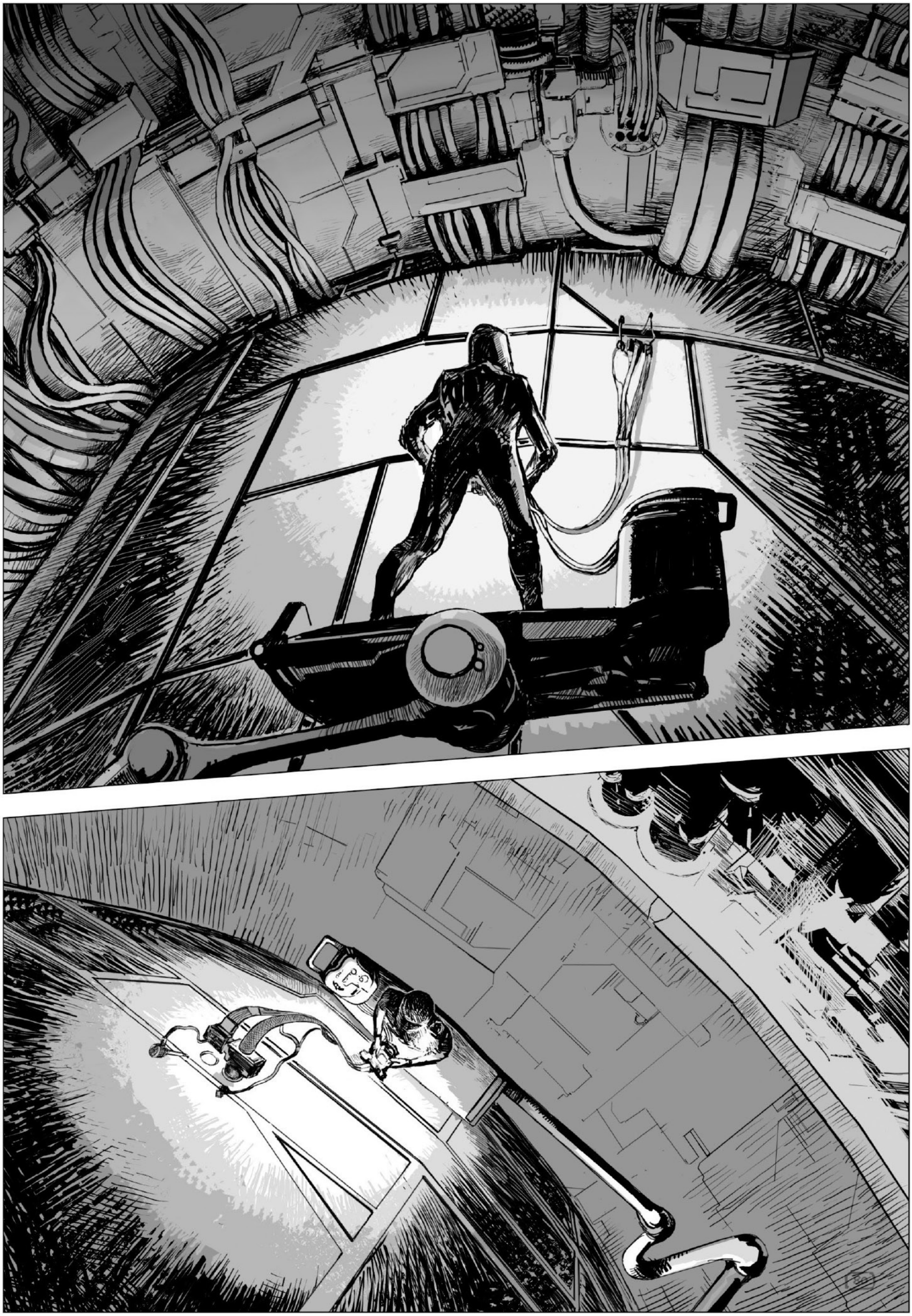


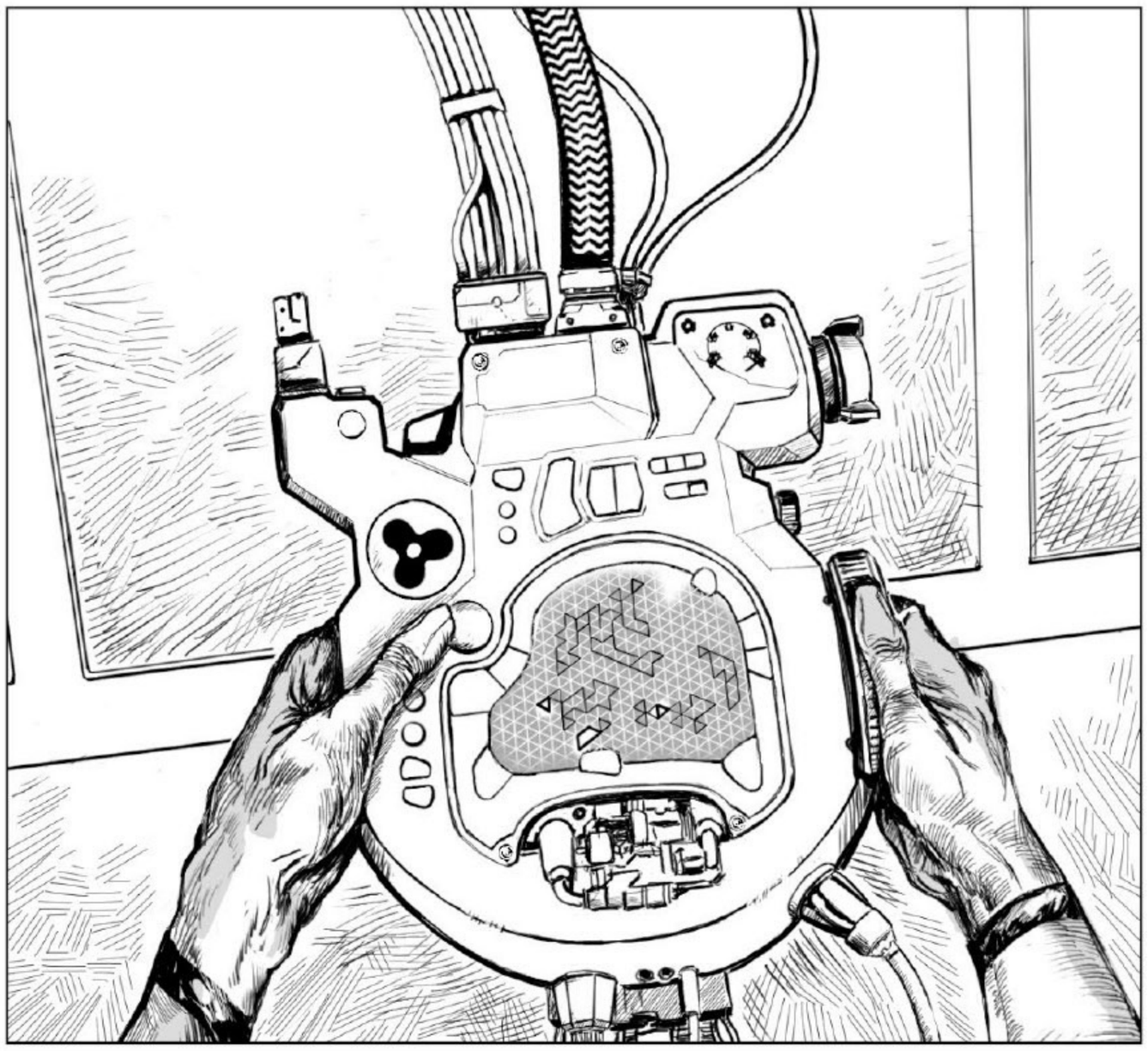
WOW... THAT BACKFIRED ON HIM...

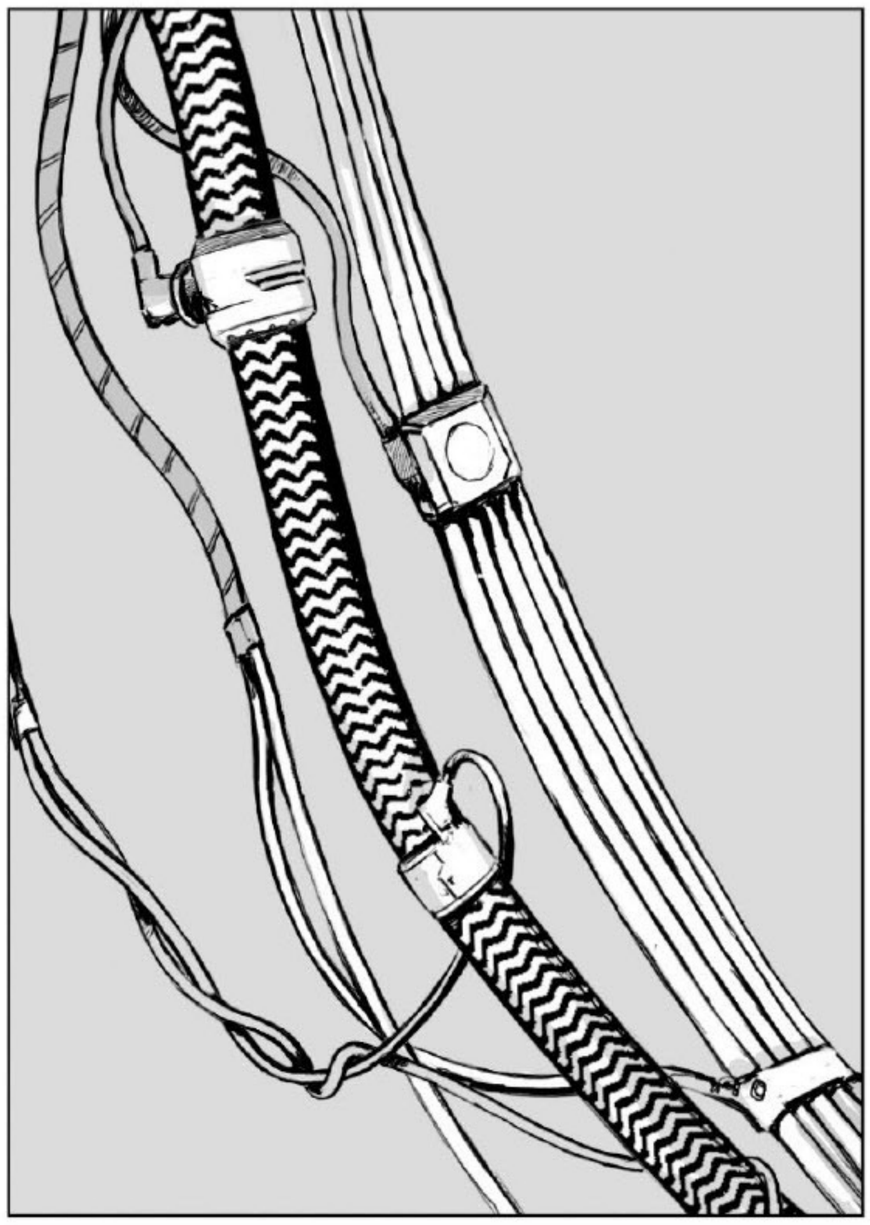
... ANYWAY, TIME I GOT OUT OF HERE...
AND SHARPISH!

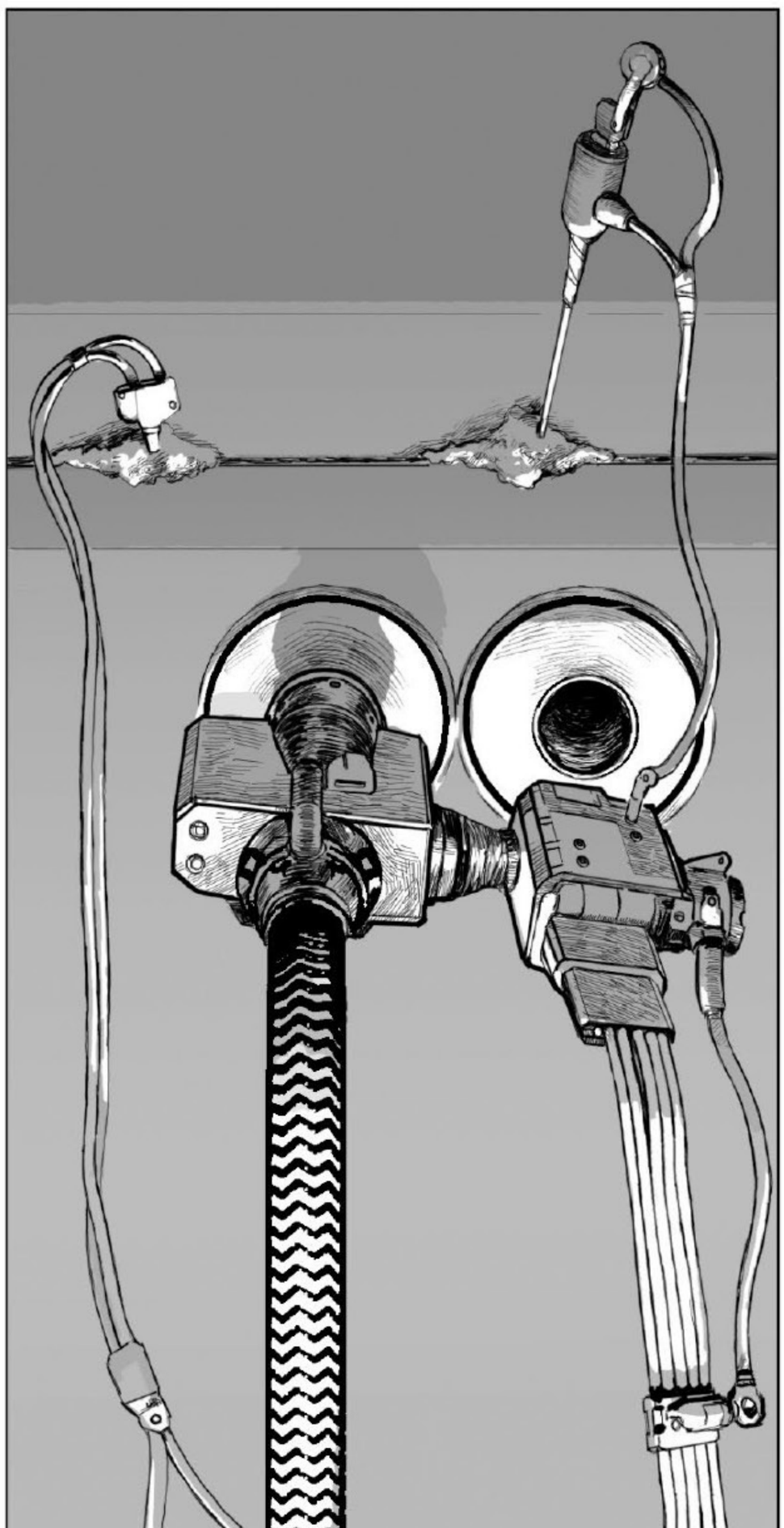

... UNLESS... PORO?
NO, TOO MUCH OF A COINCI-DENCE...

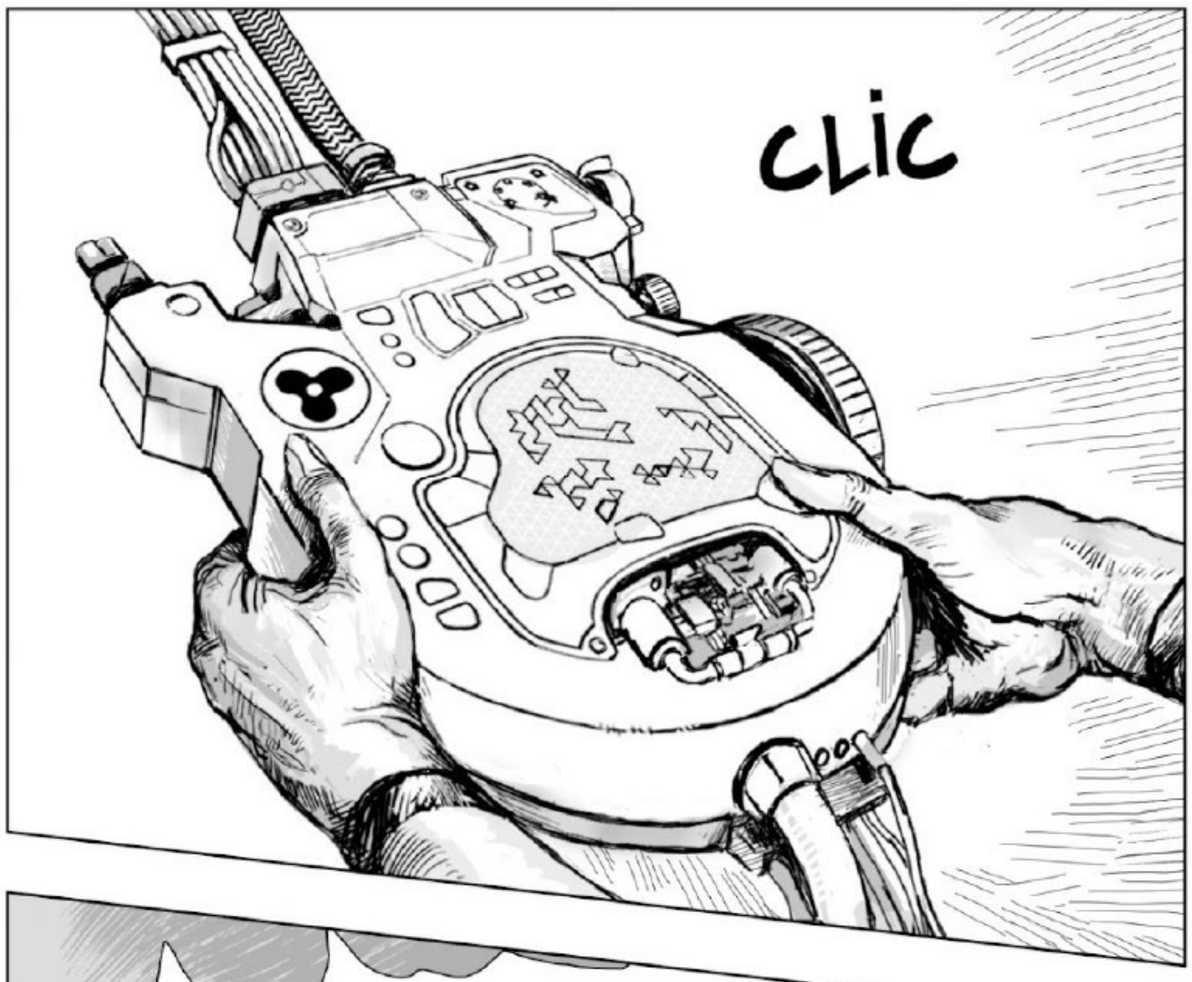
ELSEWHERE, CAPACITOR ZONE.
KLANG

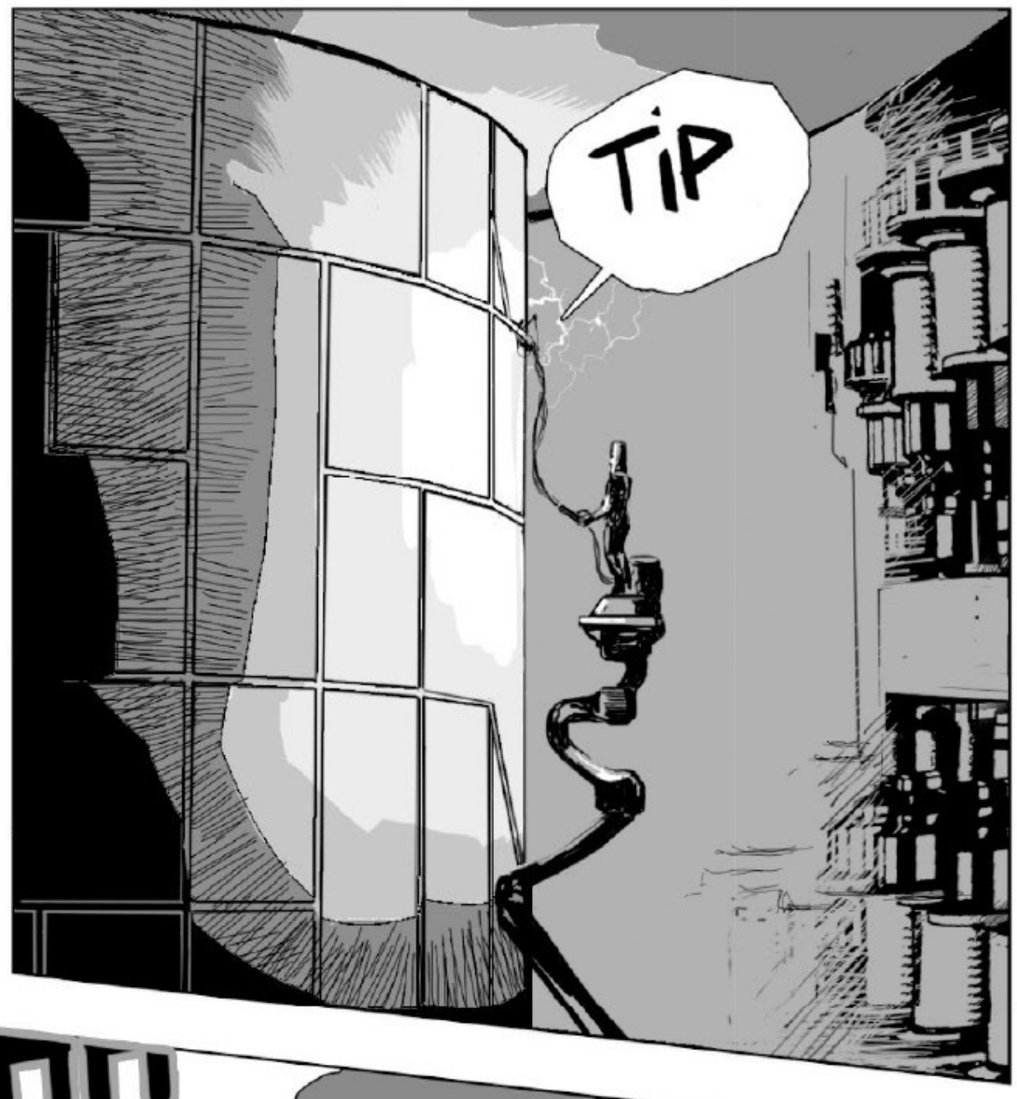




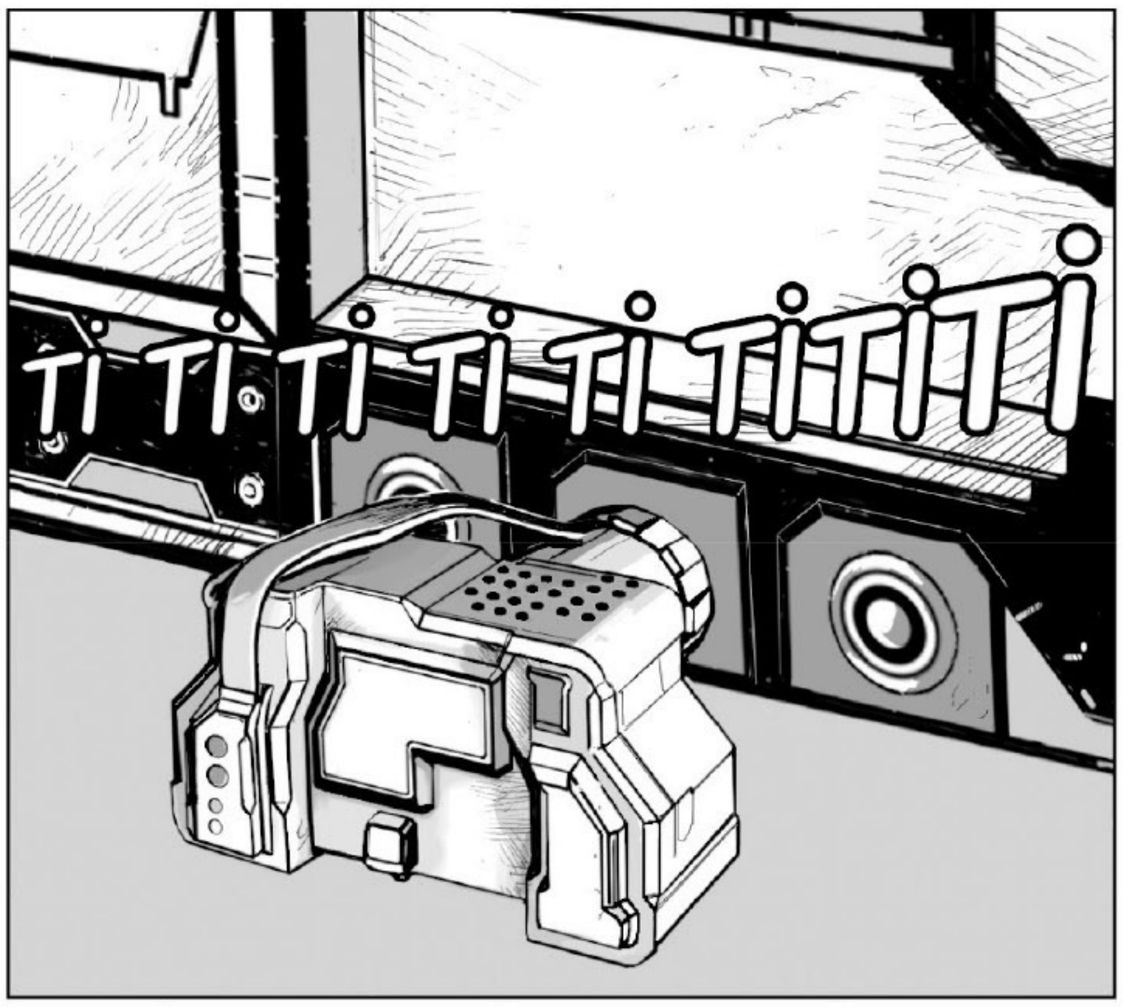


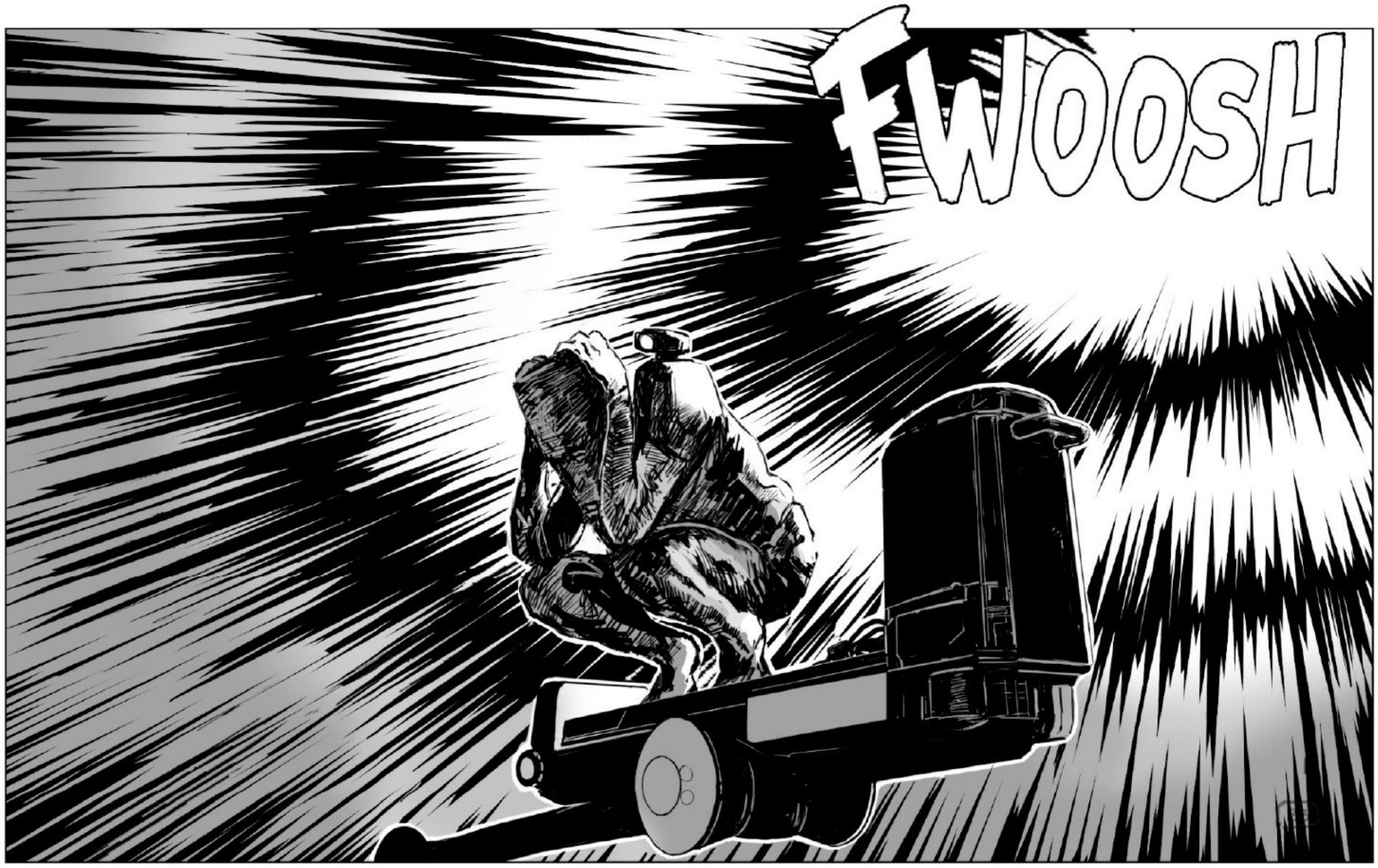



CLIC

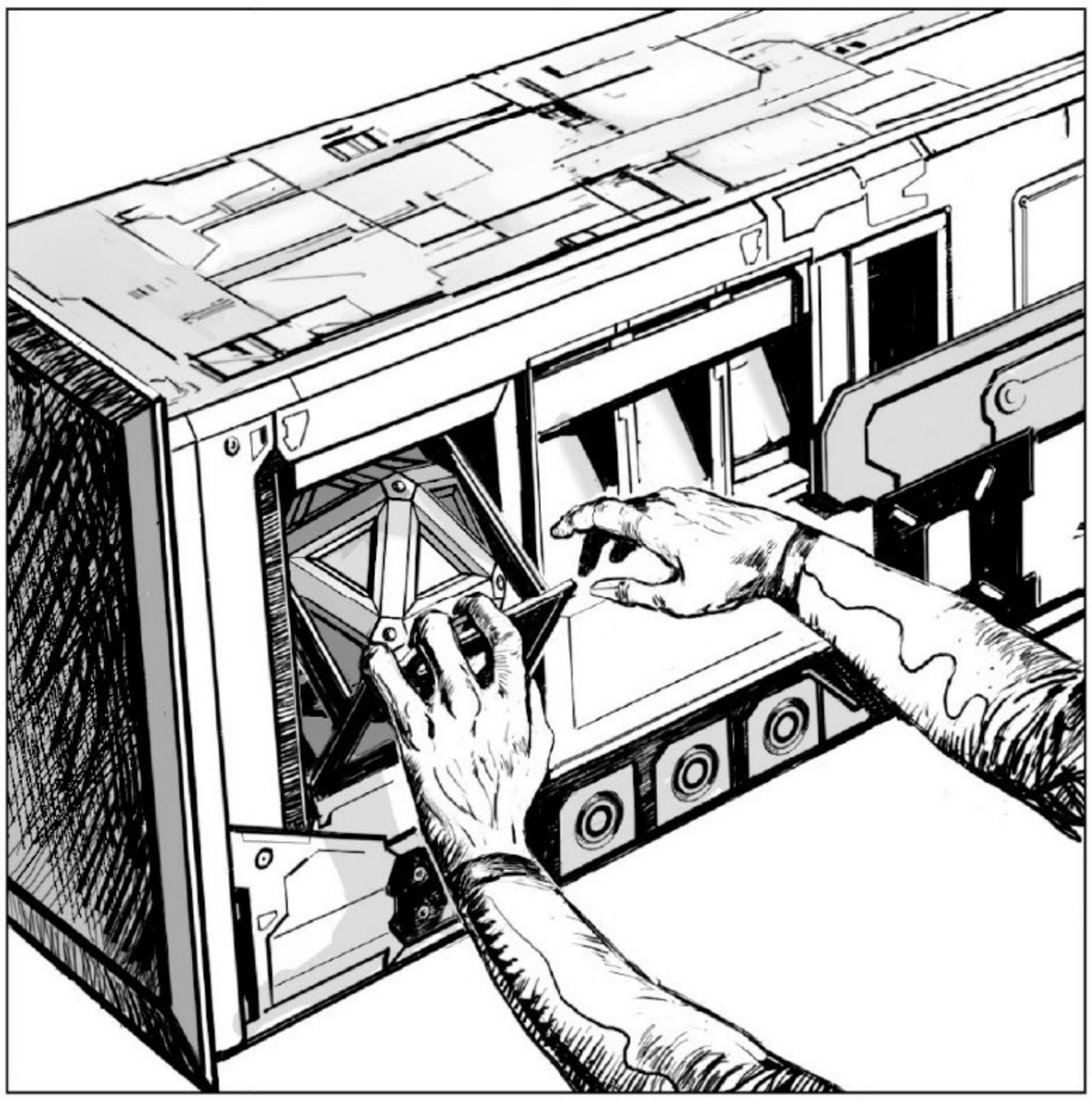

TIP

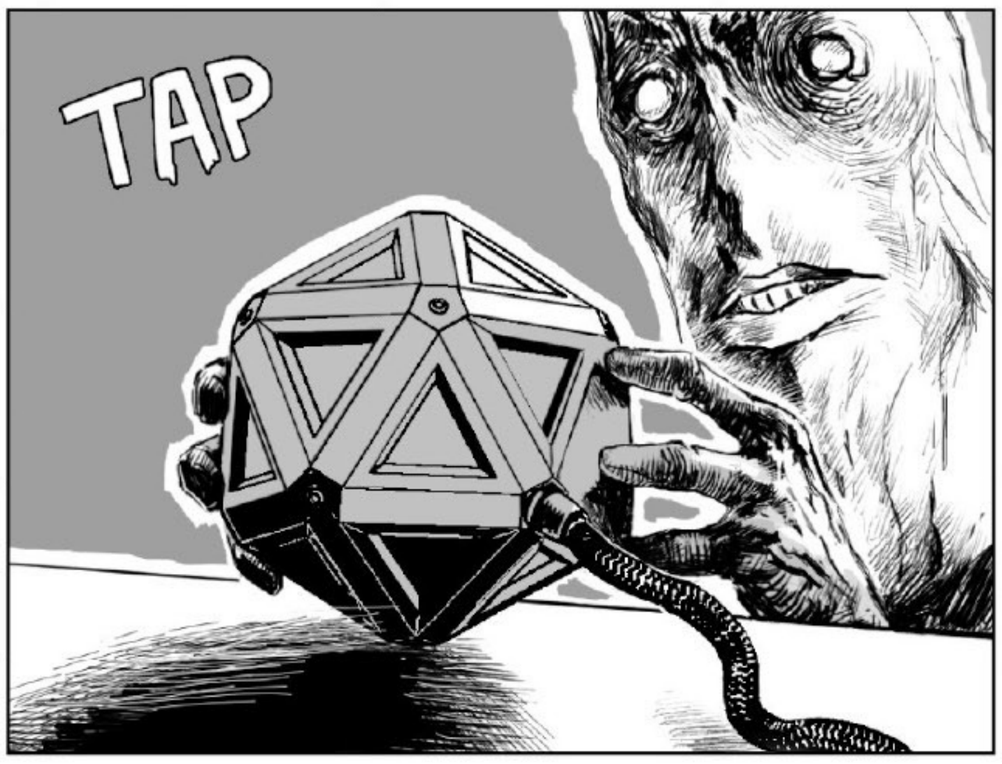
KSHHHHHHHHH

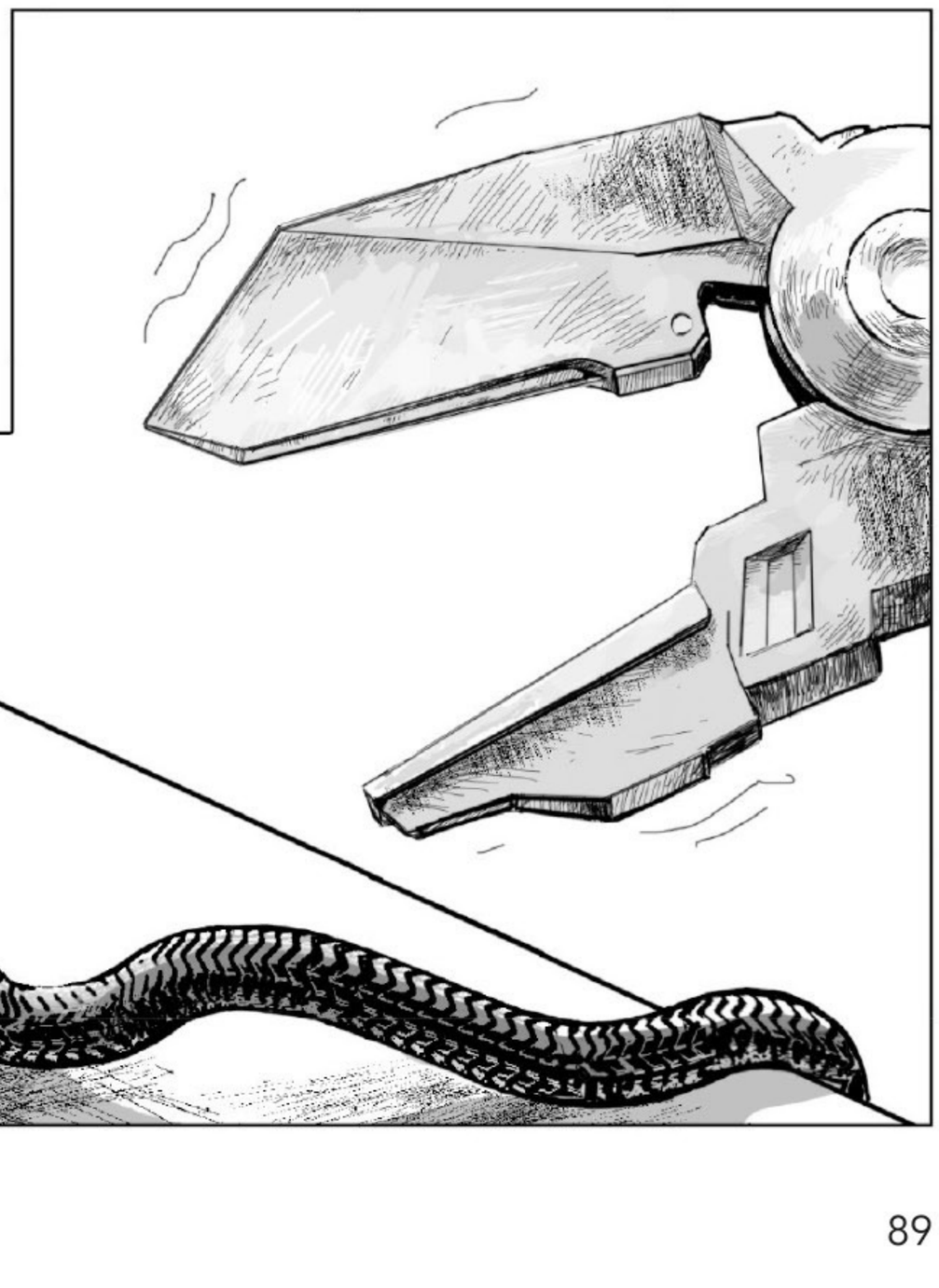

TI TI TI TI TI TITITI

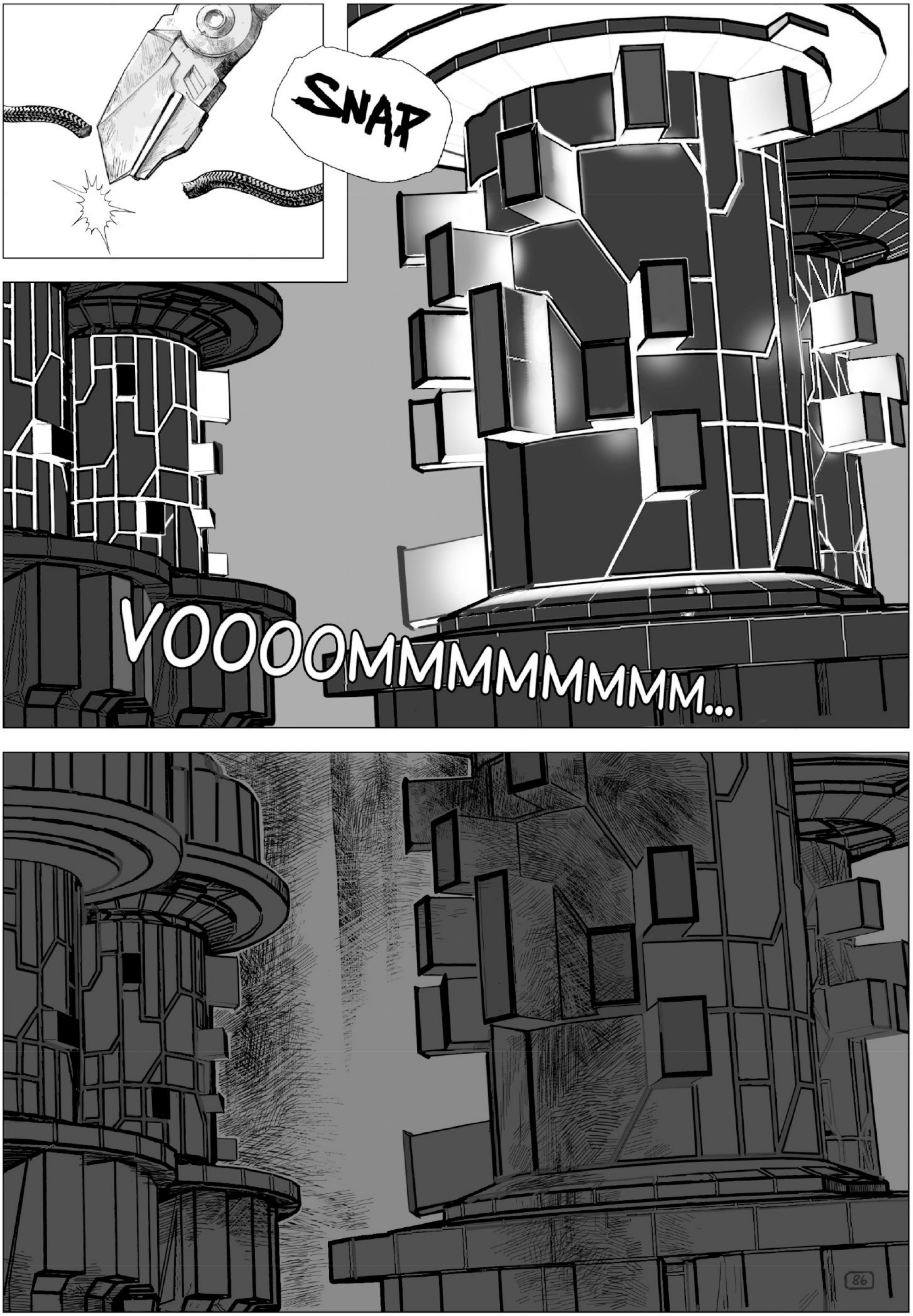

FWOOSH

VMMMMMMMMMMMMM
KSH
KSH
KSHH
KSH
PSH
KSH
84

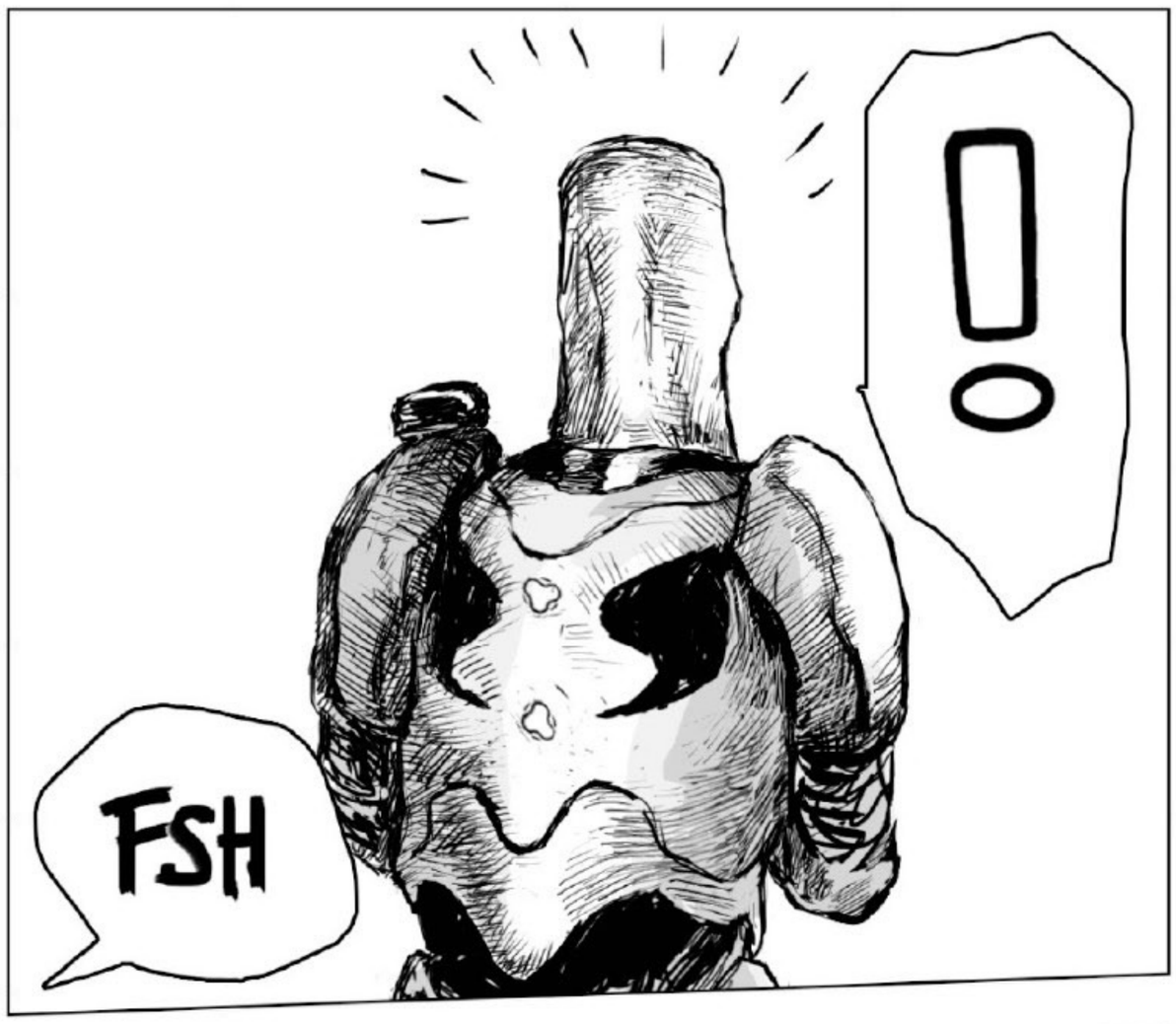



TAP

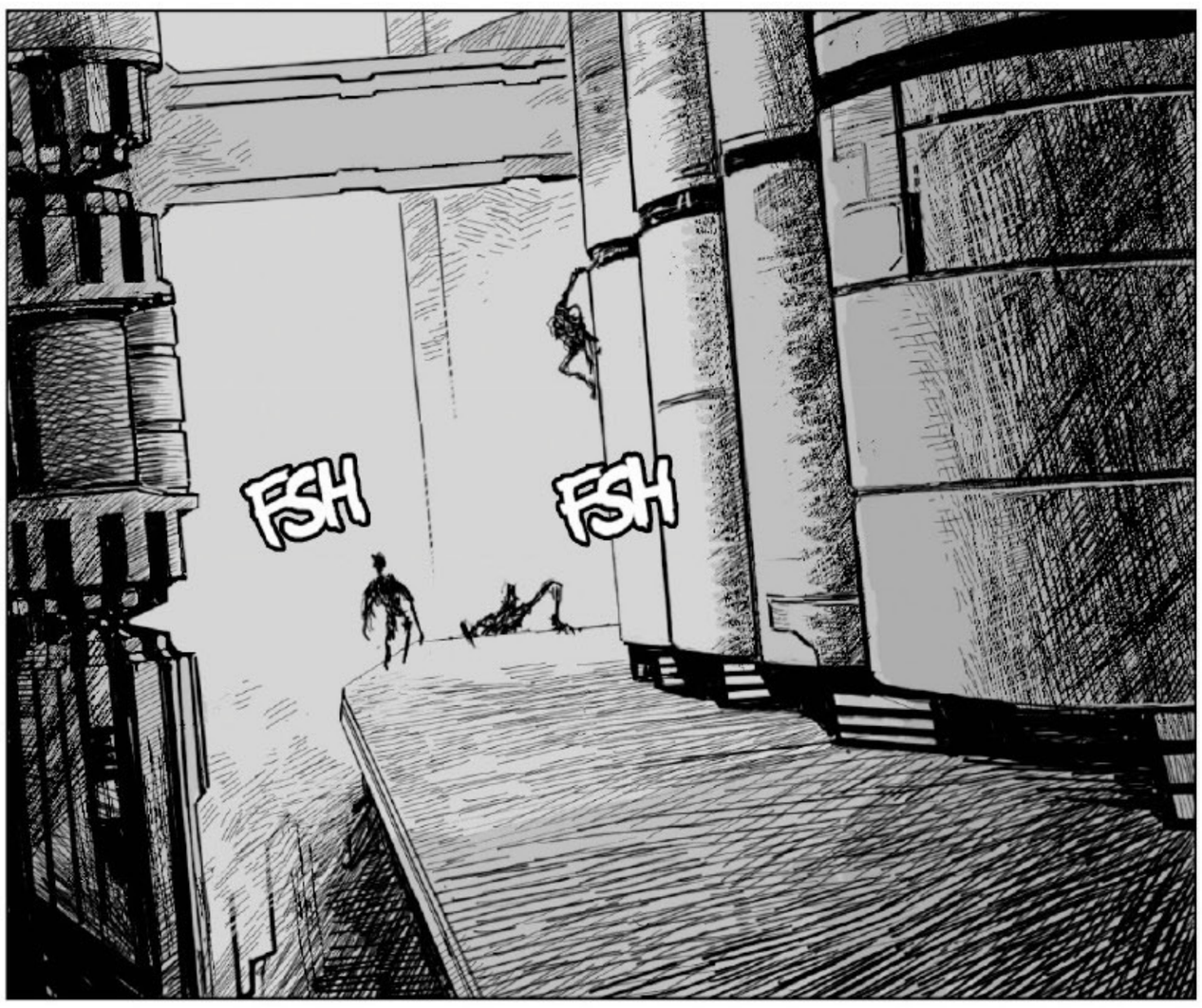



SNAP
VOOOOMMMMMMMMM...
86

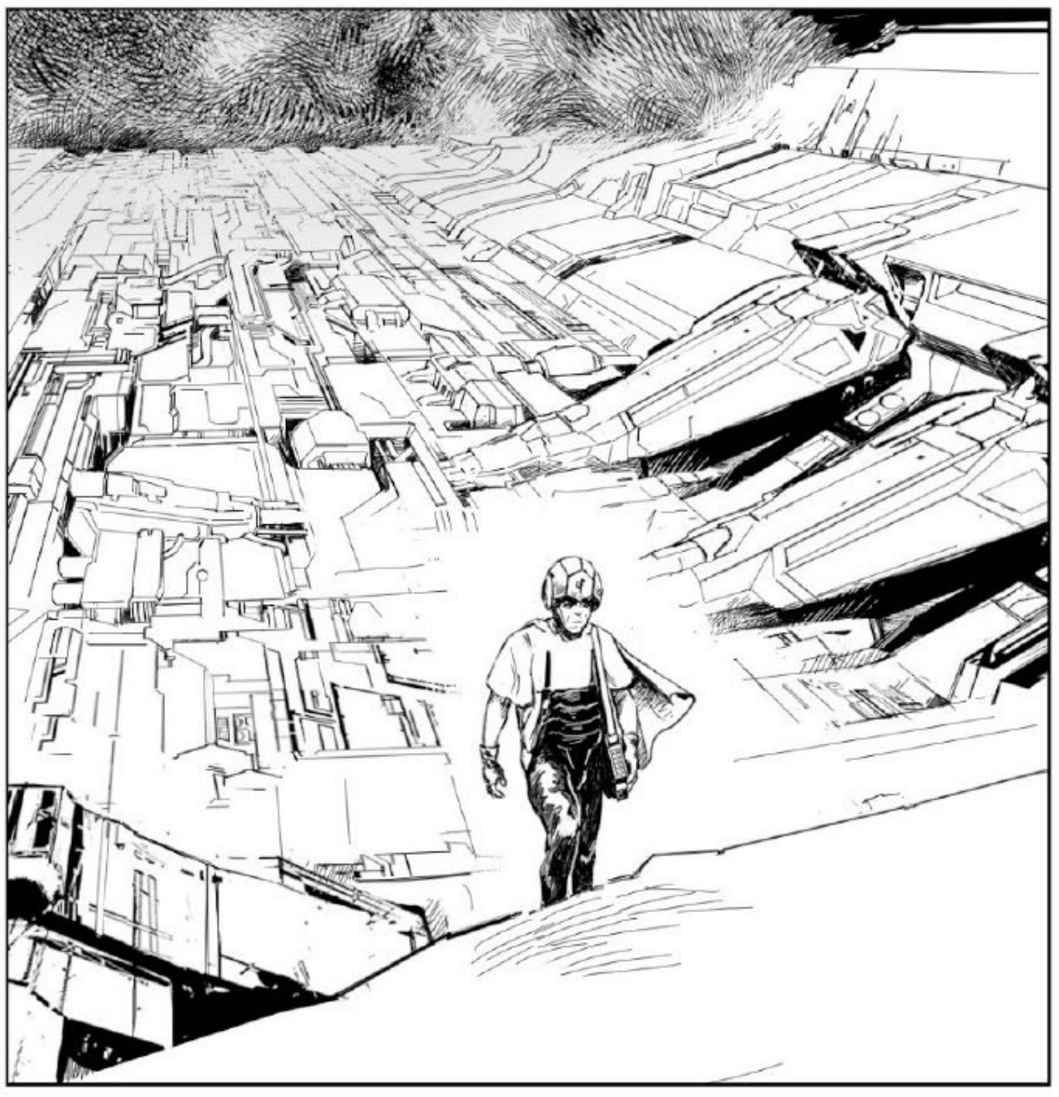
TAP

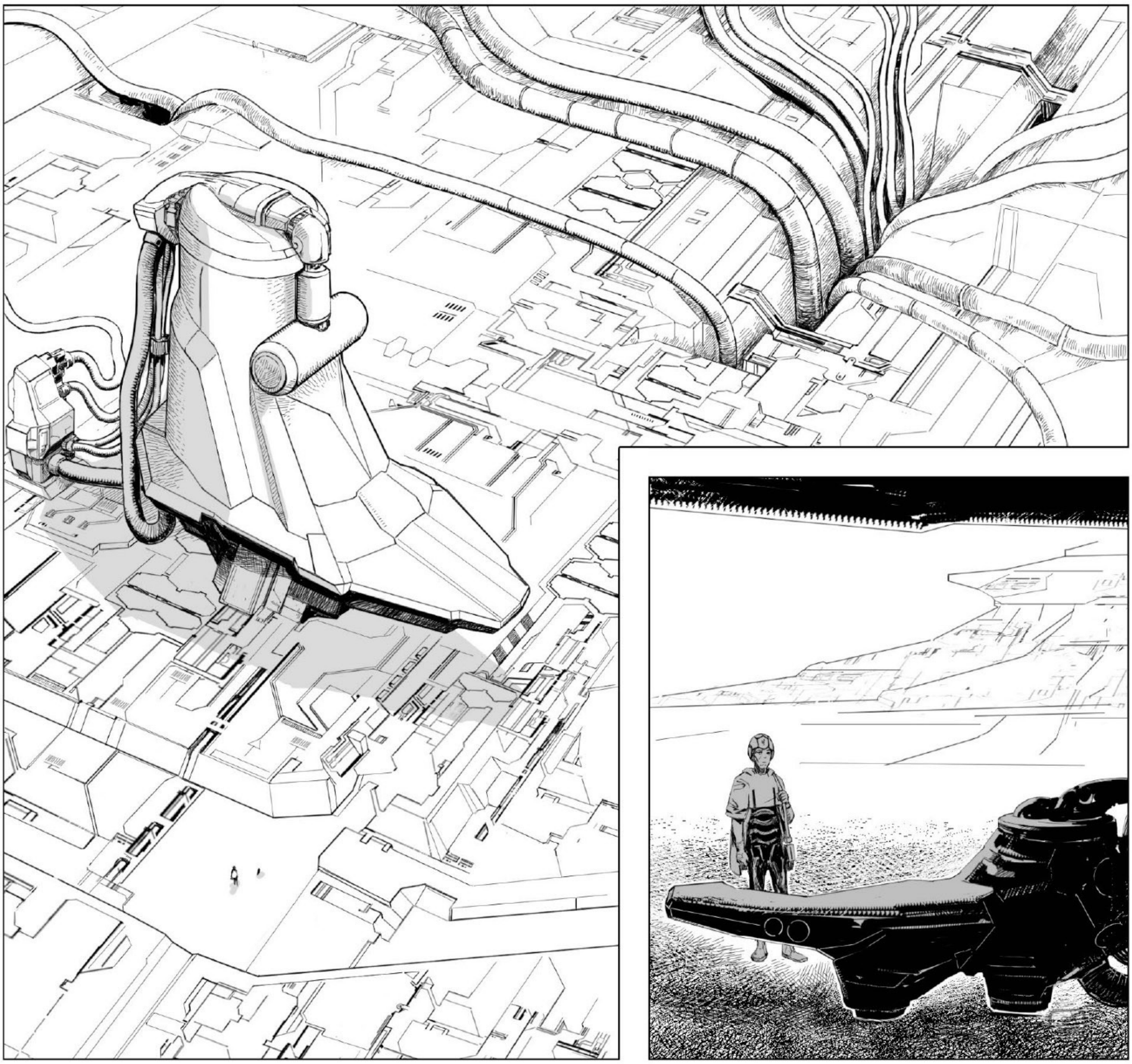

!
FSH

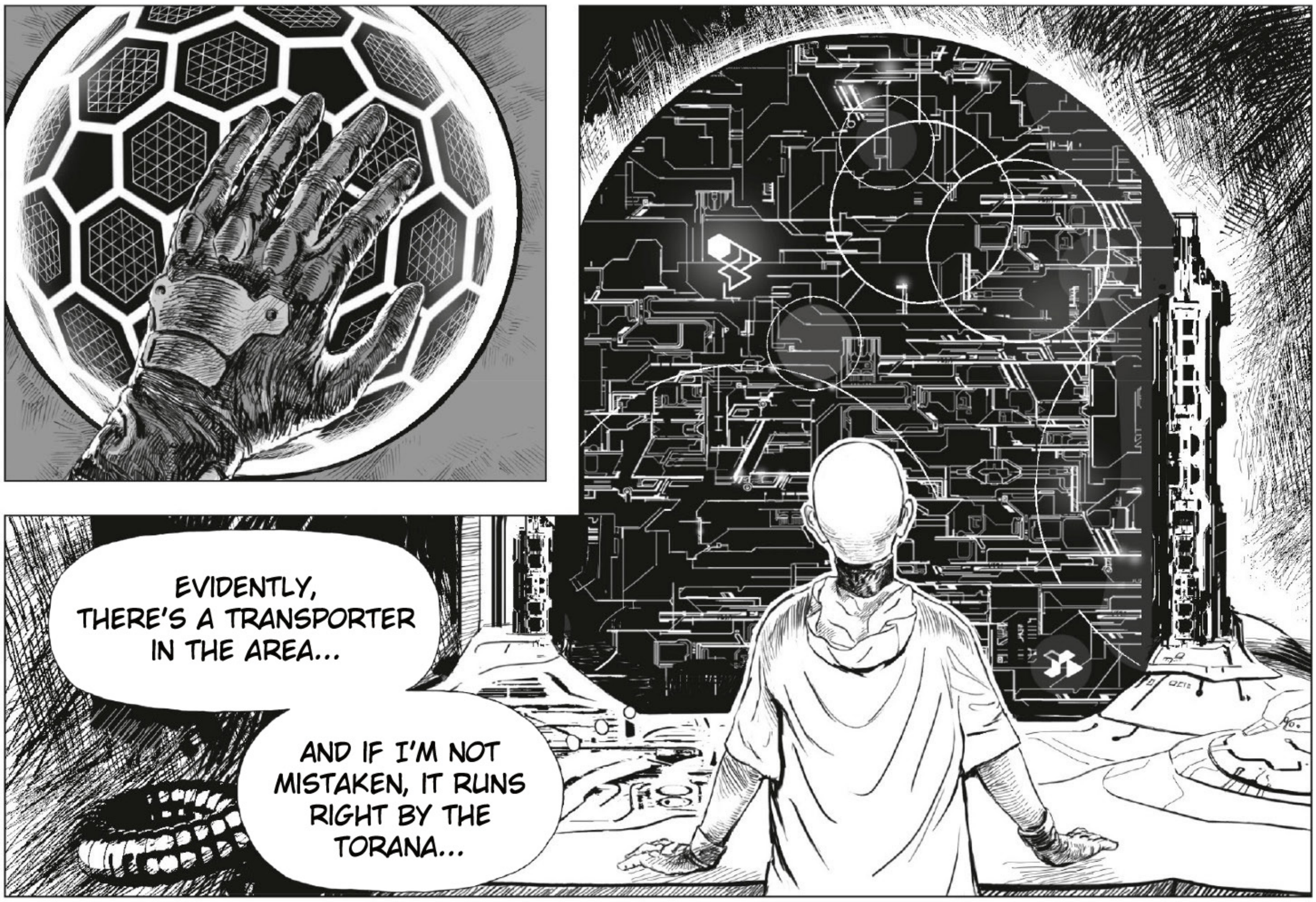
...

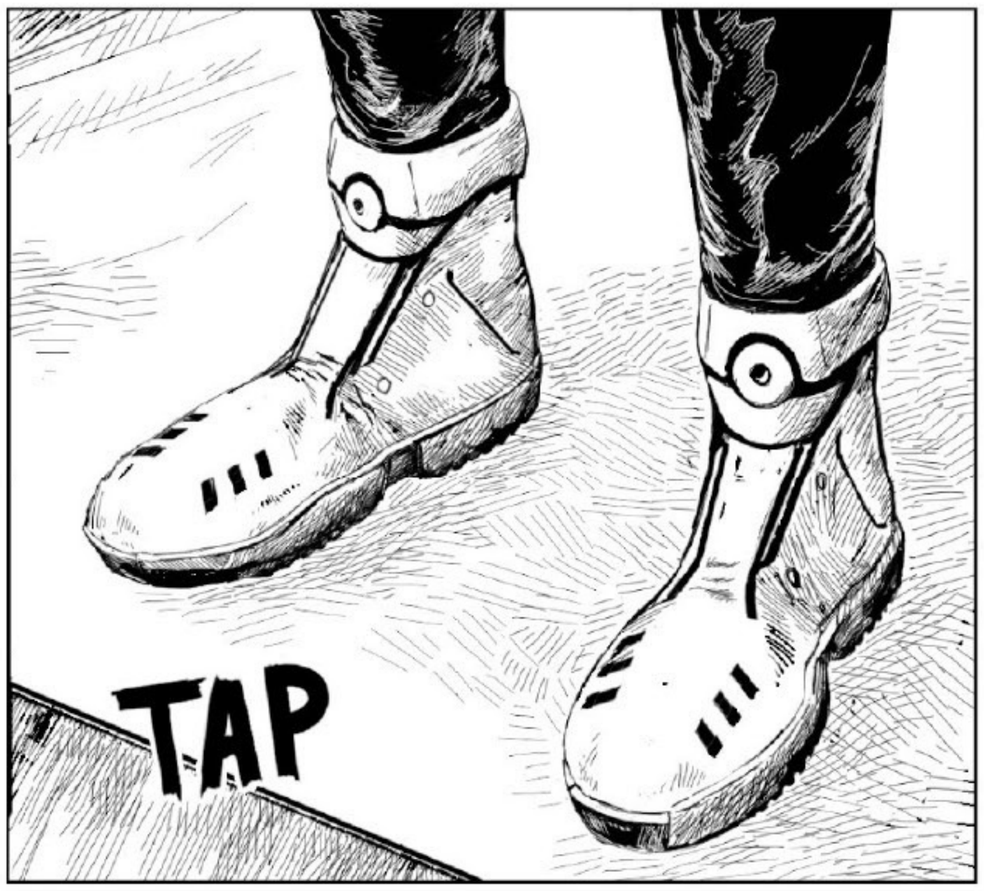

FSH
FSH

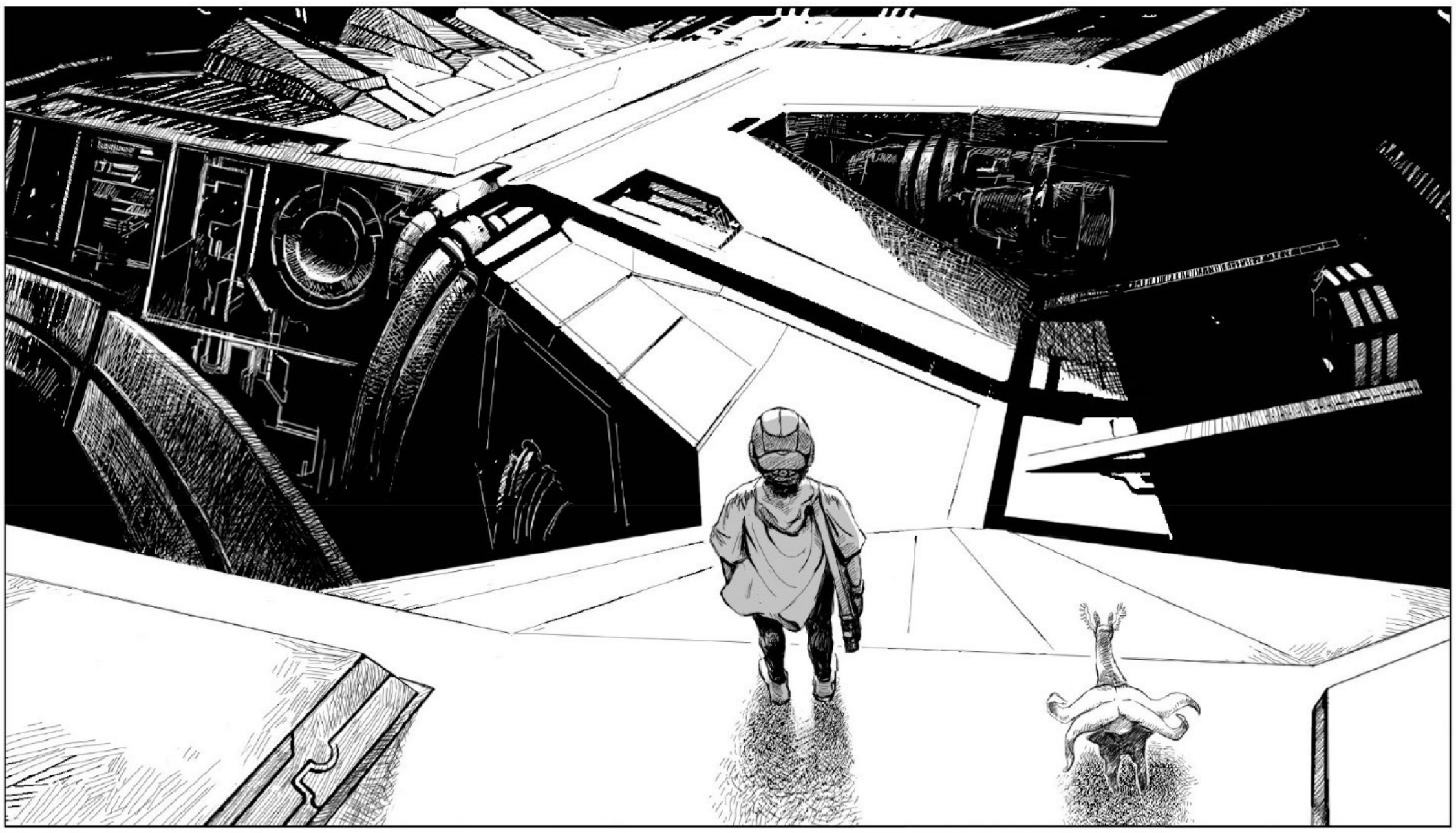
TAP
TAP
TAP



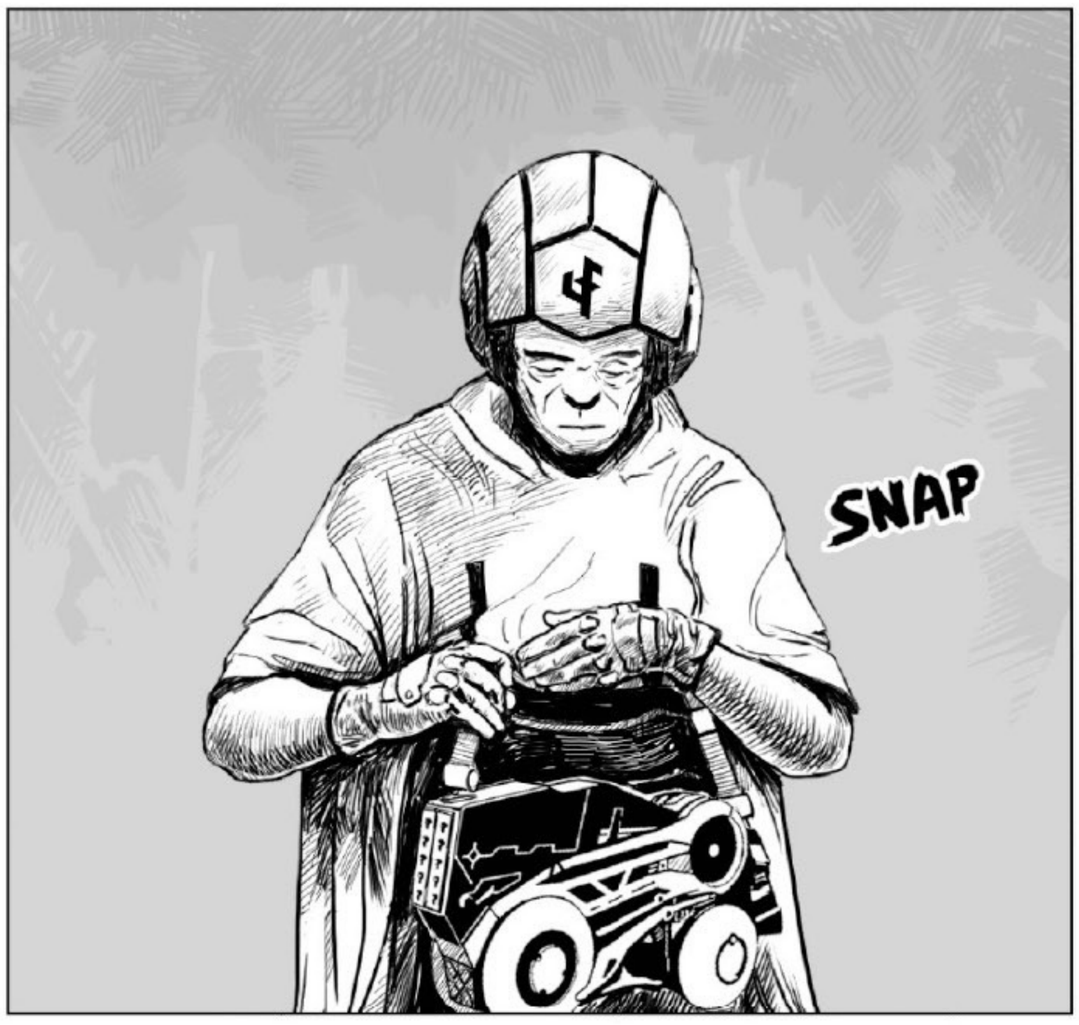



EVIDENTLY, THERE'S A TRANSPORTER IN THE AREA...
AND IF I'M NOT MISTAKEN, IT RUNS RIGHT BY THE TORANA...

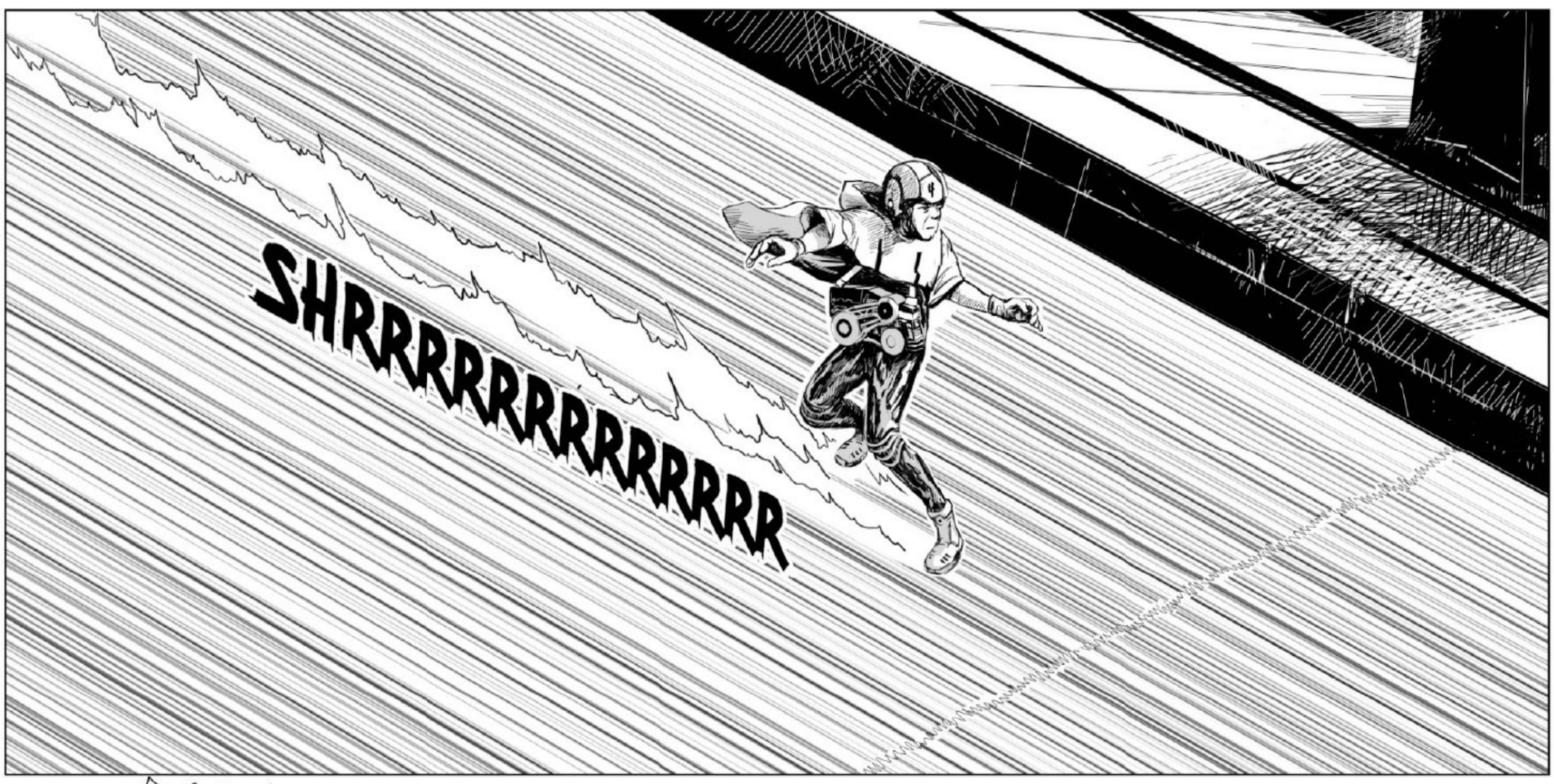

TAP

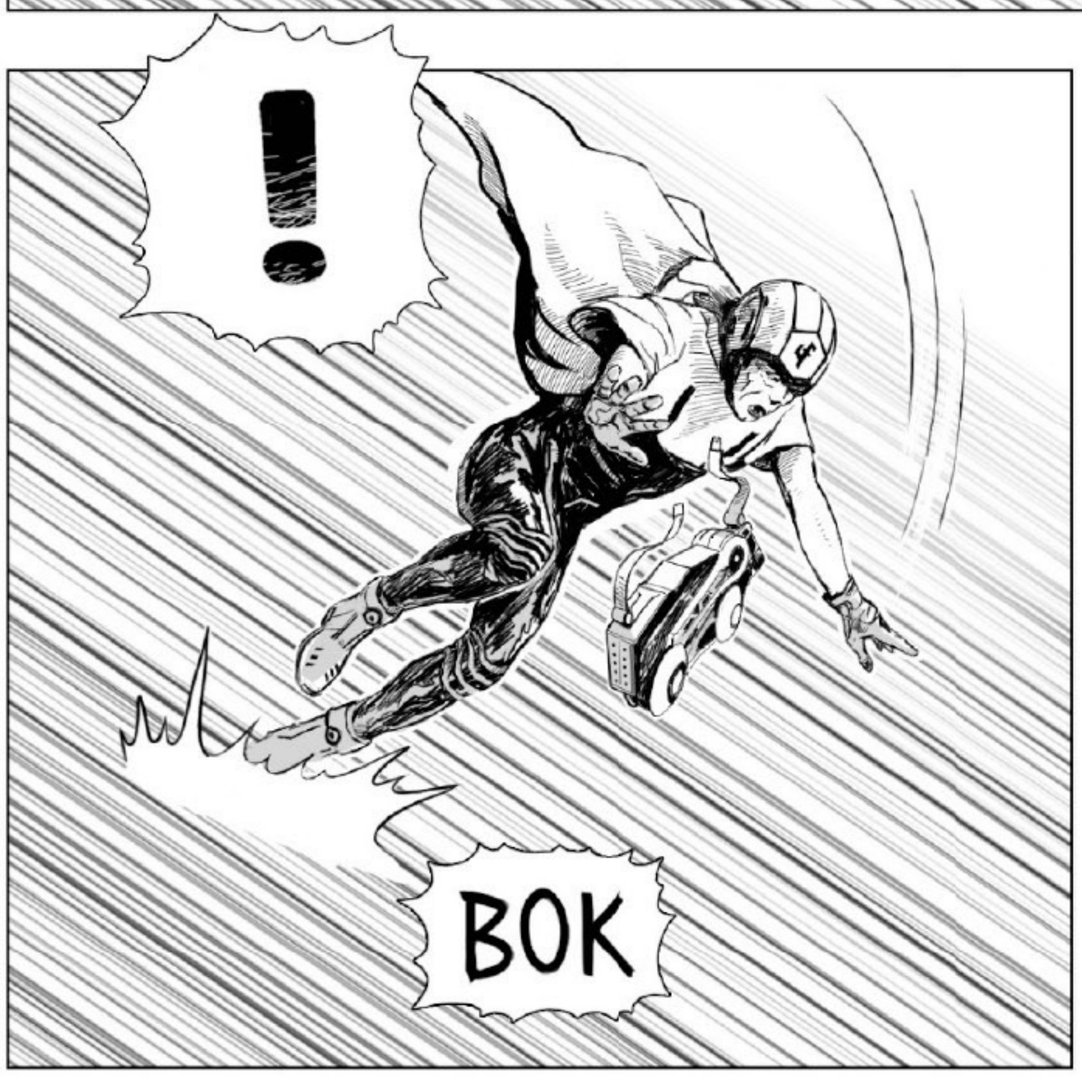


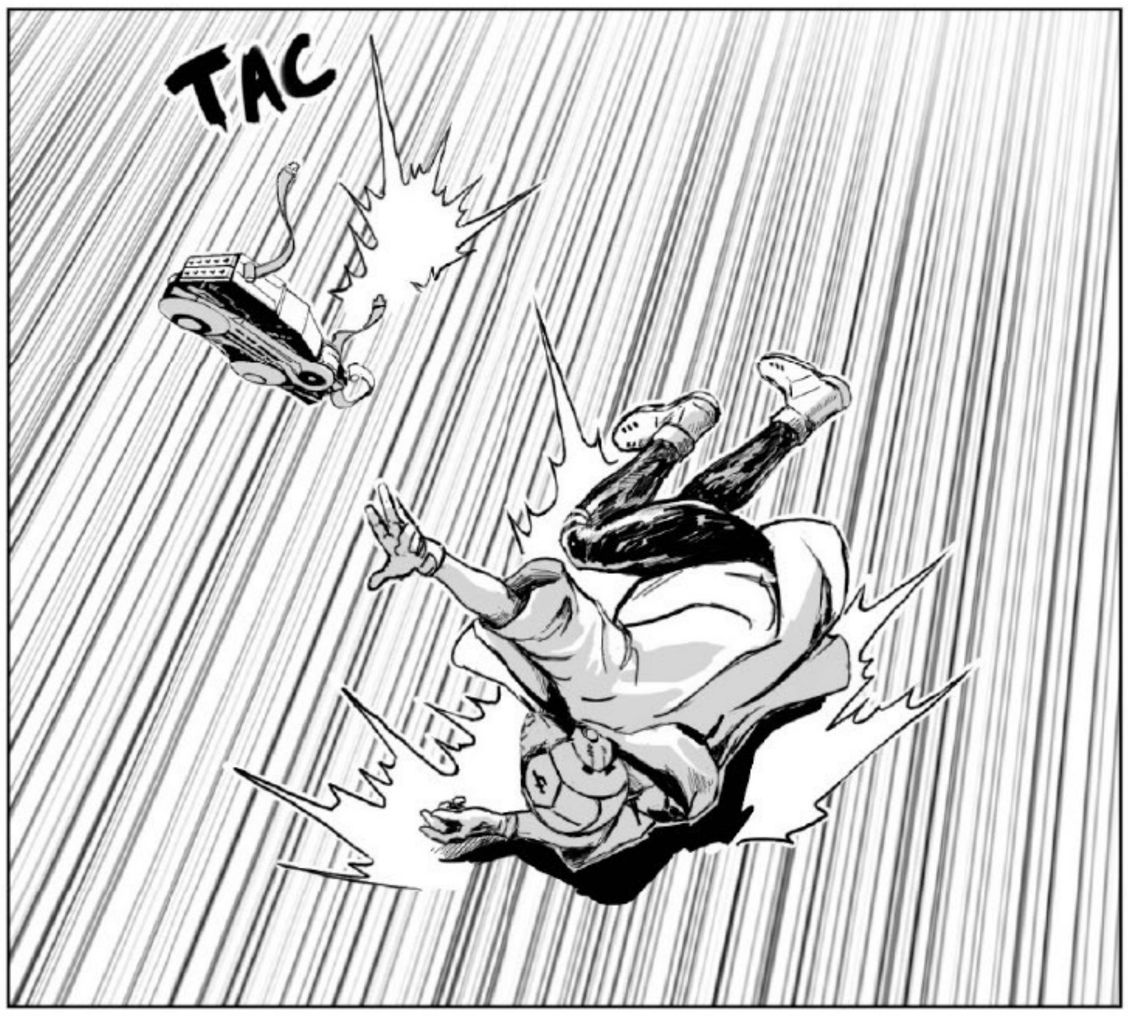
91


SNAP

THUD


SHRRRRRRRRRRRR


!
BOK


TAC

DAMN IT! I'M TOO OLD FOR THIS SHIT!

YEAH, THAT'S RIGHT! RUB IT IN!

YOU KNOW, I DON'T USUALLY TUMBLE AROUND LIKE THAT!

I'LL HAVE YOU KNOW THAT IN FORTY YEARS OF EXPLORING THIS DAMN SHIP...

... I'VE NEVER BROKEN A SINGLE BONE...

YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT I'M SAYING, DO YOU?

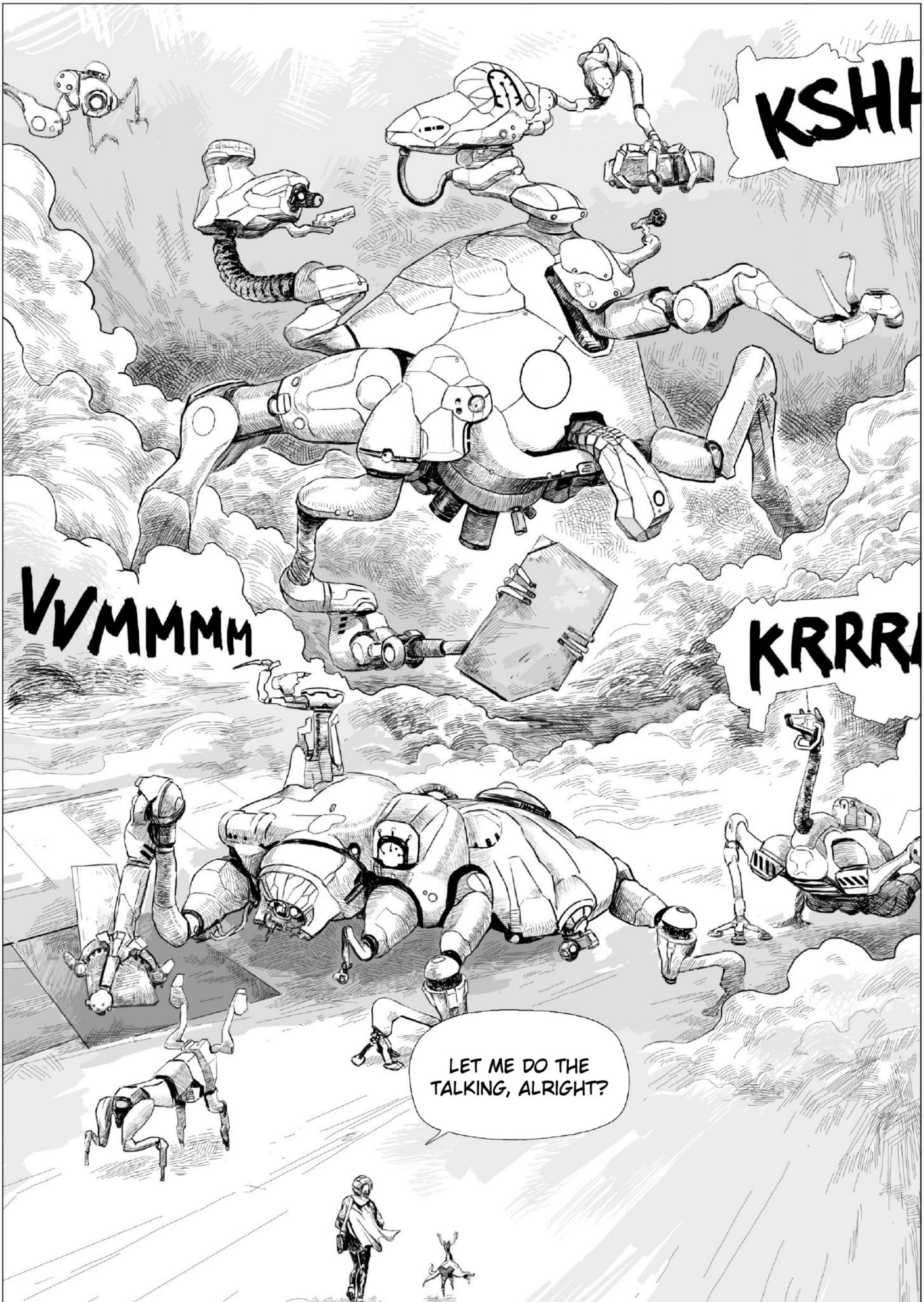
COME ON, LET'S GO! IT SHOULDN'T BE FAR FROM HERE.

WE'RE GOING TO TAKE A TRAIN.

YOU EVER BEEN ON A TRAIN?

IT'S DOWN THERE.

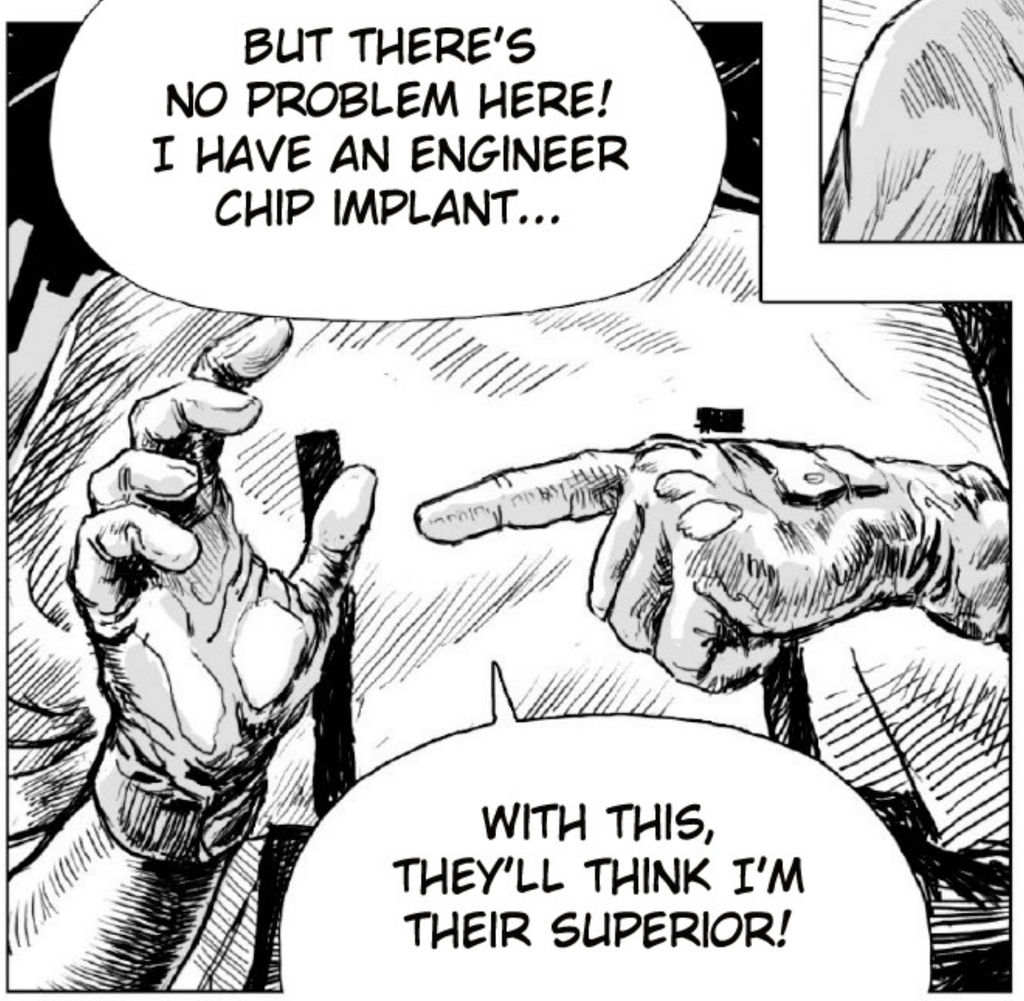
ALL THAT ACTIVITY... STRANGE... LOOKS LIKE... REPAIR WORKERS?

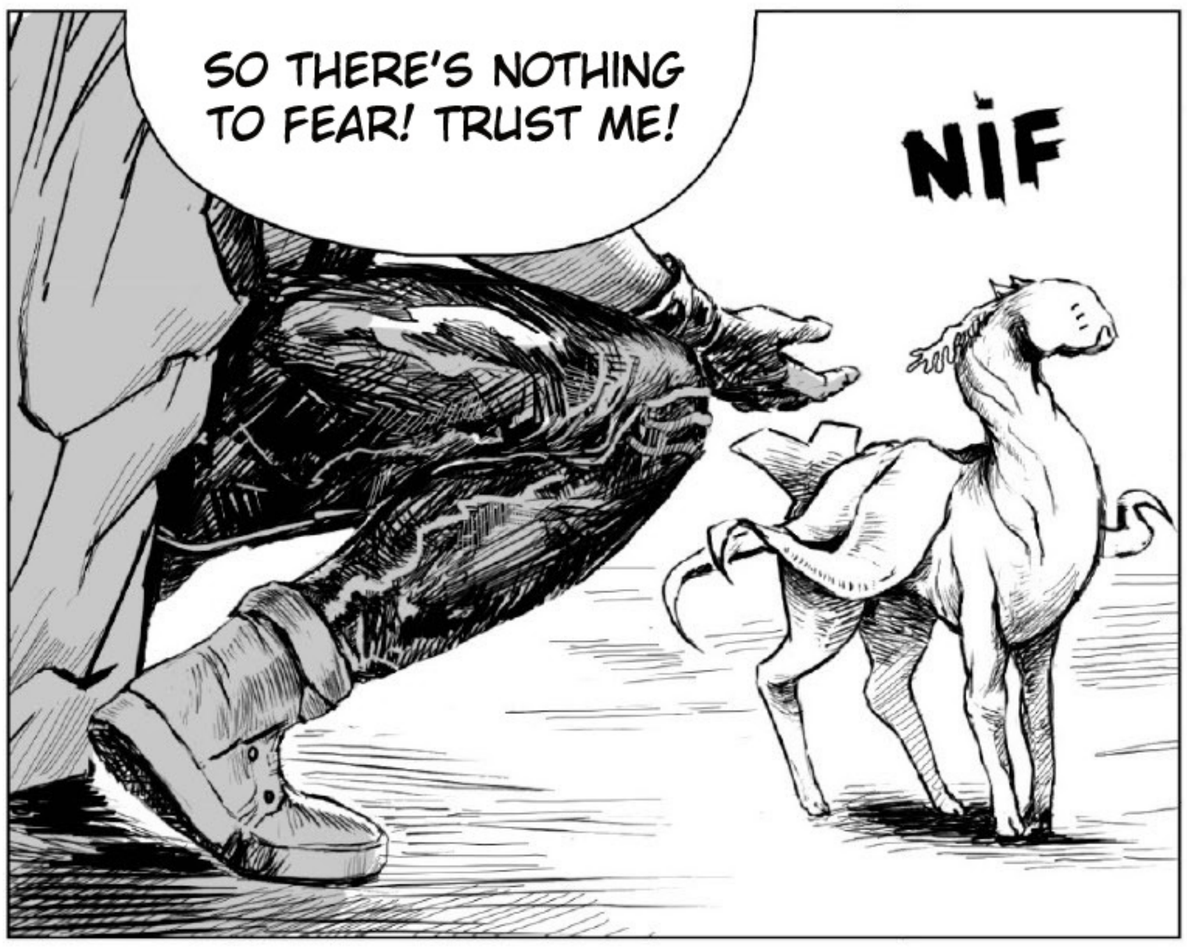

KSHH
VVMMMM
KRRR
LET ME DO THE TALKING, ALRIGHT?

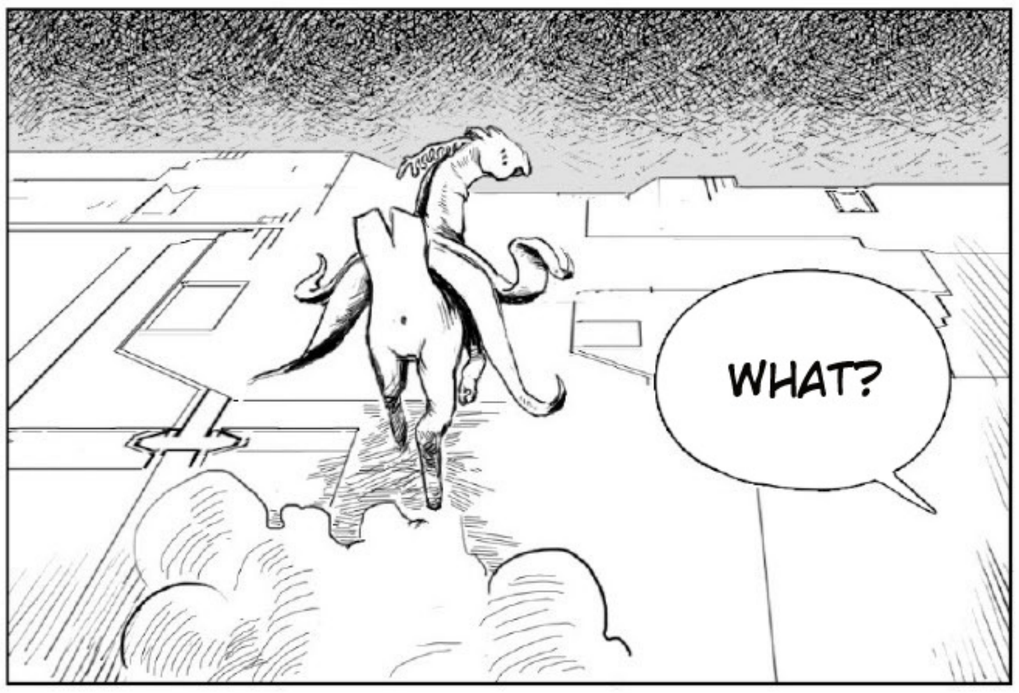
Yik

SSSSSSS
HEY! WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM?

YOU DON'T LIKE DRONES? ME NEITHER, YOU KNOW! THEY FREAK ME OUT!


BUT THERE'S NO PROBLEM HERE! I HAVE AN ENGINEER CHIP IMPLANT...
WITH THIS, THEY'LL THINK I'M THEIR SUPERIOR!


SO THERE'S NOTHING TO FEAR! TRUST ME!
NIF


WHAT?

WELL, SHIT!
I DIDN'T SEE THAT ONE COMING!

AT LEAST TRY TO STAY IN THE AREA!

!

HOW COULD SOMETHING SO BIG GET SO CLOSE WITHOUT ME REALISING?

LANGUAGE CORRECTION! DAALI'IN ENGINEER GRADE FOUR! I NEED ANSWERS.

...

WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH THIS DAMN ROBOT?

IS THERE A PROBLEM?

BIOCHIP ANALYSIS CONFIRMS PRESENCE OF A DAAU'IN ENGINEER.

BUT THE BIOFORM PRESENT IS NOT OF THE DAAU'IN RACE.

INFORMATION PROCESSING IN PROGRESS...

?

OH MY GOD! WE'VE GOT AN OVERZEALOUS SUPERVISOR HERE!

OR MAYBE THEY'VE UPDATED THE SECURITY PROTOCOLS?

I AM DAAU'IN! MY RACE HAS EVOLVED. THERE WERE... MUTATIONS. YOUR DATABASE IS NOT UP TO DATE.

NETWORK CONNECTION NOT AVAILABLE.

TEMPORARY DATA ACCEPTED.

I DON'T BELIEVE IT! IT WORKED!

IS THE TRANSPORTER FUNCTIONAL?

NEGATIVE.

MAINTENANCE IS ONGOING ON ALL MACHINES IN THIS SECTOR.

ESTIMATED DURATION OF REPAIRS?

326 HOURS.

DAMN IT! THERE'S NO WAY I CAN WAIT THAT LONG!

ALRIGHT. IS THERE A STORAGE AREA NEAR HERE?

LET'S SAY... WITHIN A RADIUS OF FIVE KILOMETRES?

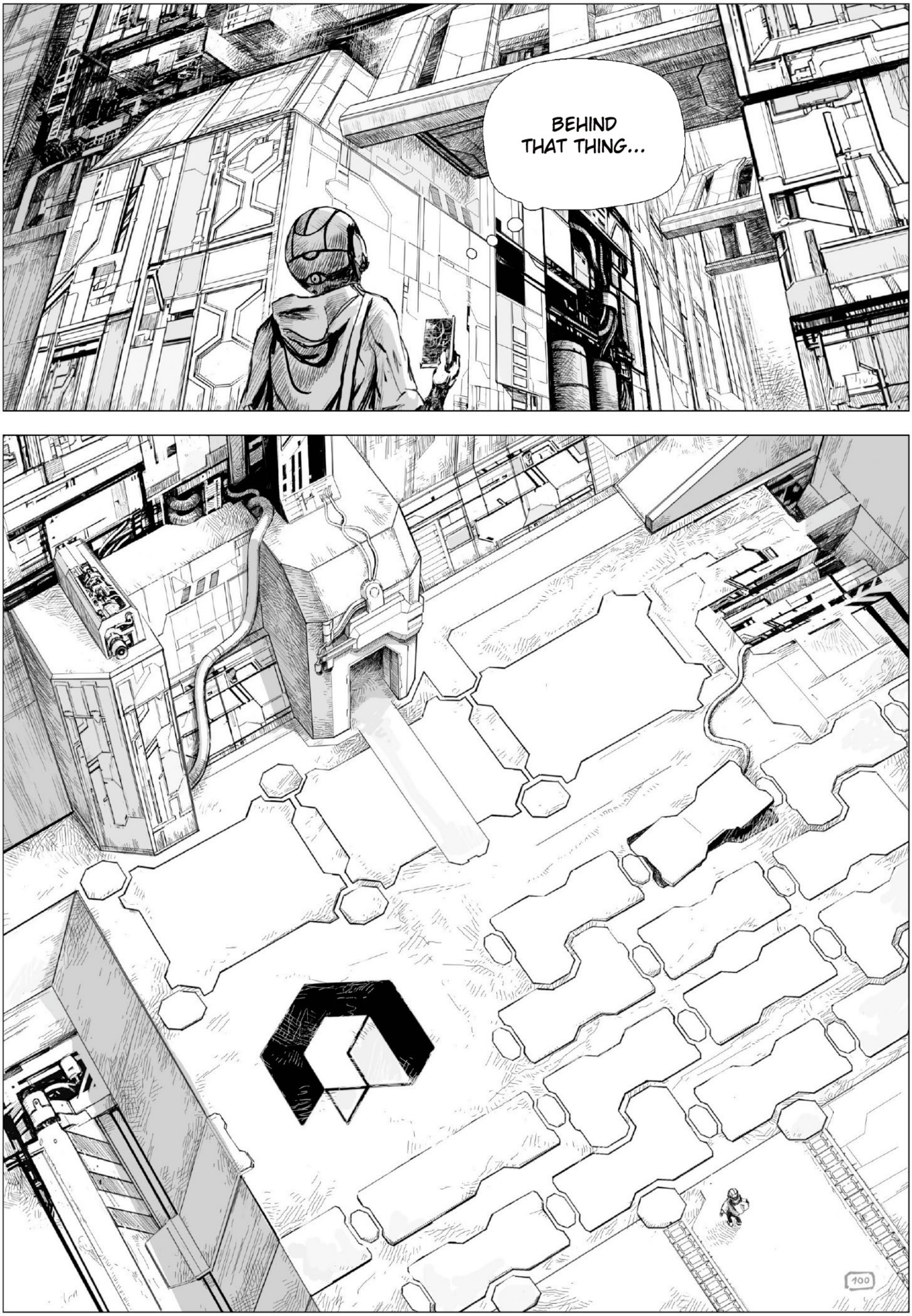
AFFIRMATIVE! MULTIPLE STORAGE AREAS WITHIN STATED...

PRINT ME A TEMPOMAP.

IT WILL DEACTIVATE IN...

... IN FIVE HOURS, I KNOW.

TOO BAD ABOUT THE TRANSPORTER. BUT AT LEAST I CAN CHANGE OUT MY GEAR.


BEHIND
THAT THING...
100

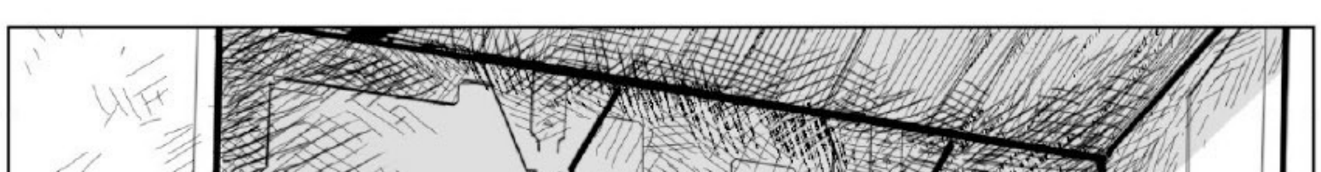
IT'S OPEN? I DON'T LIKE THIS...

IT DOESN'T SEEM TO HAVE BEEN FORCED... WHICH MEANS...

... I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE AROUND HERE WITH A CHIP...

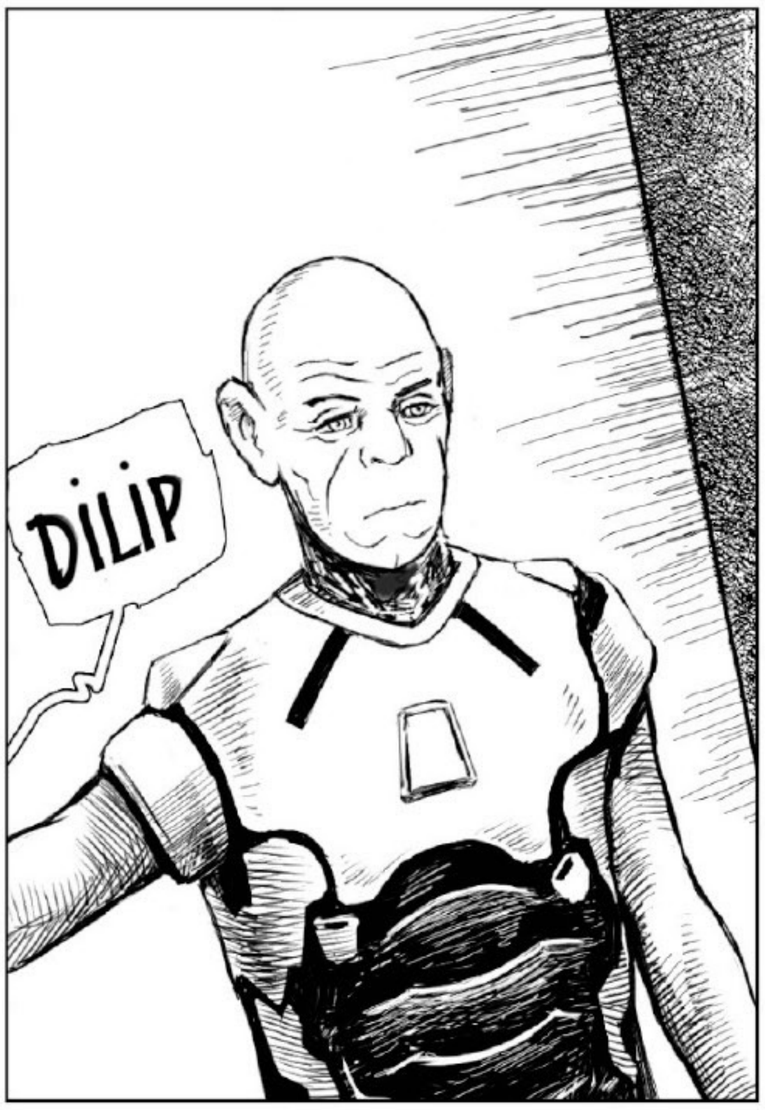
VRRRR

SCHLA



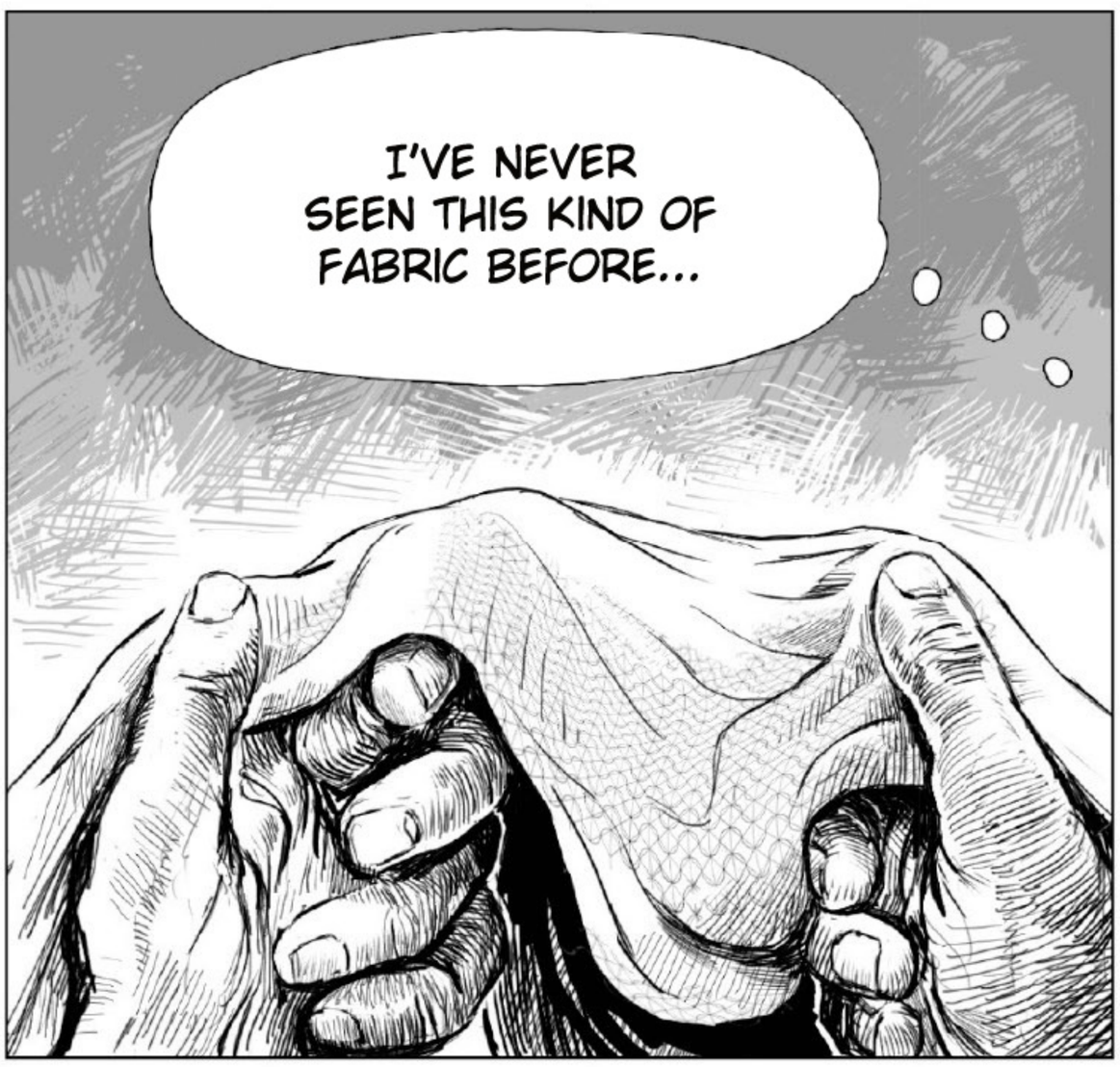
EMPTY!
IT'S ALL
GONE!

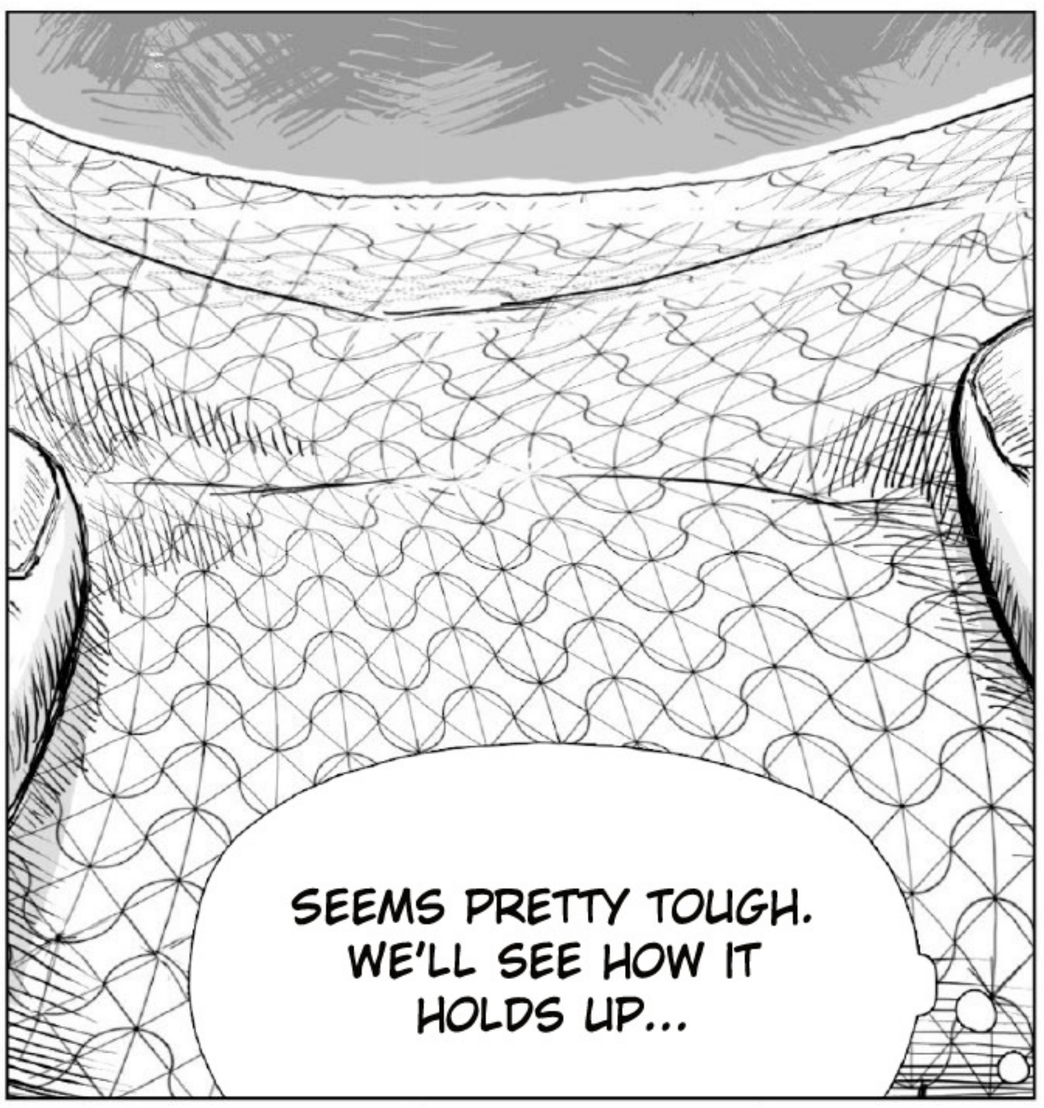
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
ALRIGHT,
ONE LAST LOOK
AROUND...

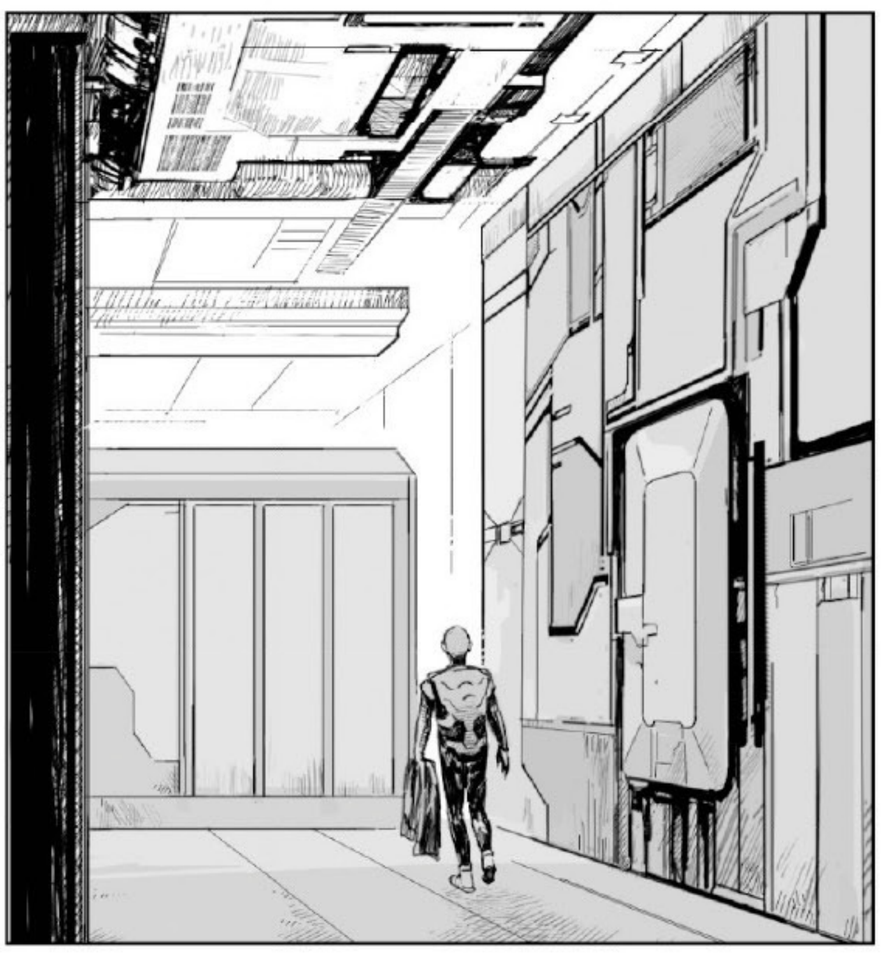

DILIP

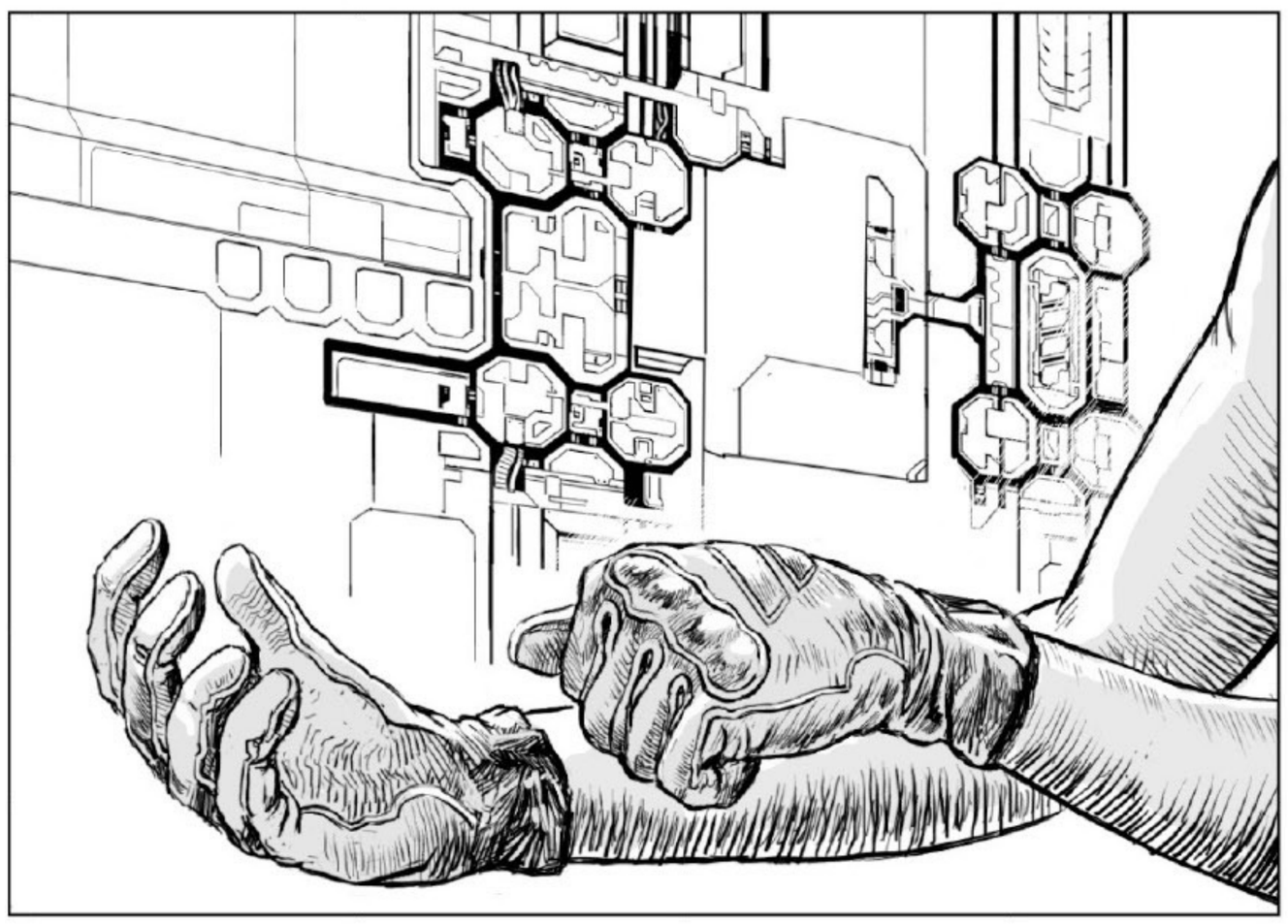
WHAT'S THIS RAG?

A CAPE?


I'VE NEVER SEEN THIS KIND OF FABRIC BEFORE...


SEEMS PRETTY TOUGH. WE'LL SEE HOW IT HOLDS UP...





NOW TO FILL UP MY CANTEENS...

OKAY, NO NUTRIENT BARS THIS TIME...

BUT I'VE STILL GOT A FEW STOCKED UP...

A LITTLE DISAPPOINTING, I MUST ADMIT...

BUT IT'S NOT A TOTAL FAILURE EITHER!

HEY, WHERE'D YOU GO DOGGY?

LOOK WHAT I...

OH.

?

LIGHTS OUT!

IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE THE LAST ONE!

BACK THEN I STILL HAD MY OLD NIGHT-VISION GOGGLES...

I NEED TO FIND SOMEWHERE SAFE TO HOLE UP WHILE I CAN STILL SEE A LITTLE BIT!

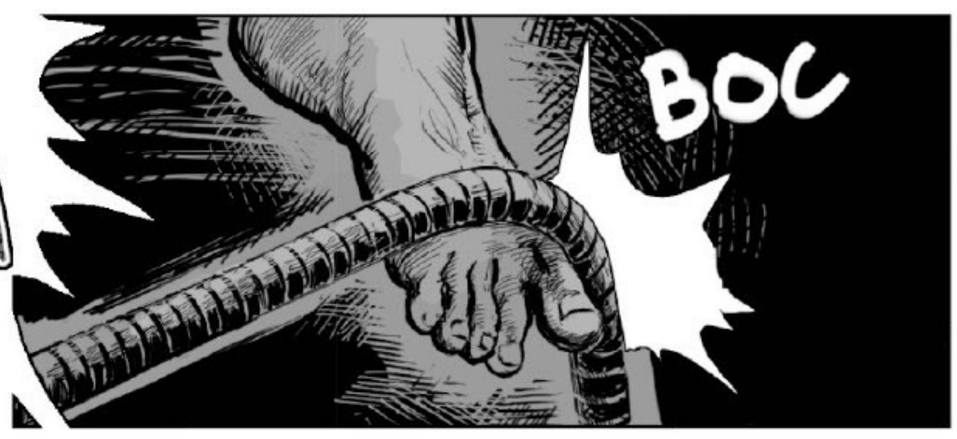
THERE! THAT'LL DO NICELY!

IF THERE ARE ANY BEASTS AROUND HERE THAT CAN SEE IN THE DARK...

... I'D RATHER BE SOMEWHERE HIGH UP.

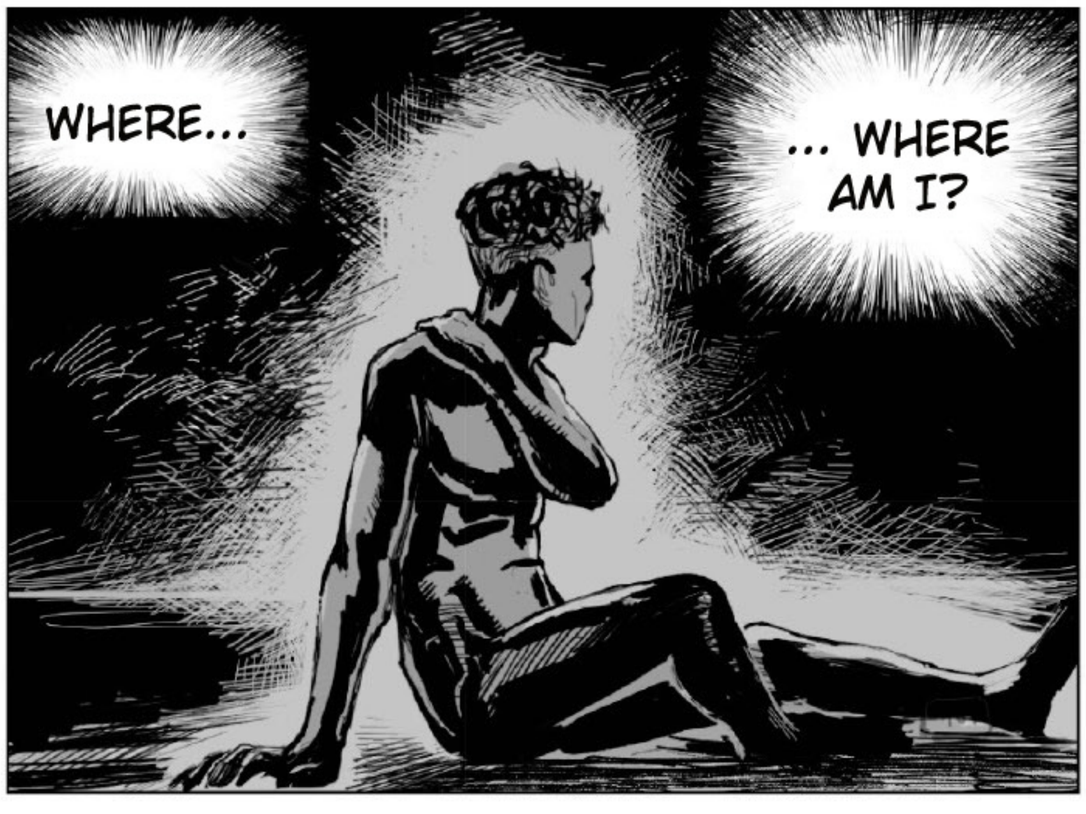
ALRIGHT, THERE WE GO.

AAAH


BOC

!

PLAF


WHERE...
... WHERE AM I?

DARK...

... IT'S SO DARK...

AM I... DEAD?

IS THIS DEATH?

DARKNESS...

... AND COLD?

... FOR ALL ETERNITY?

NO...
IT CAN'T BE...

!

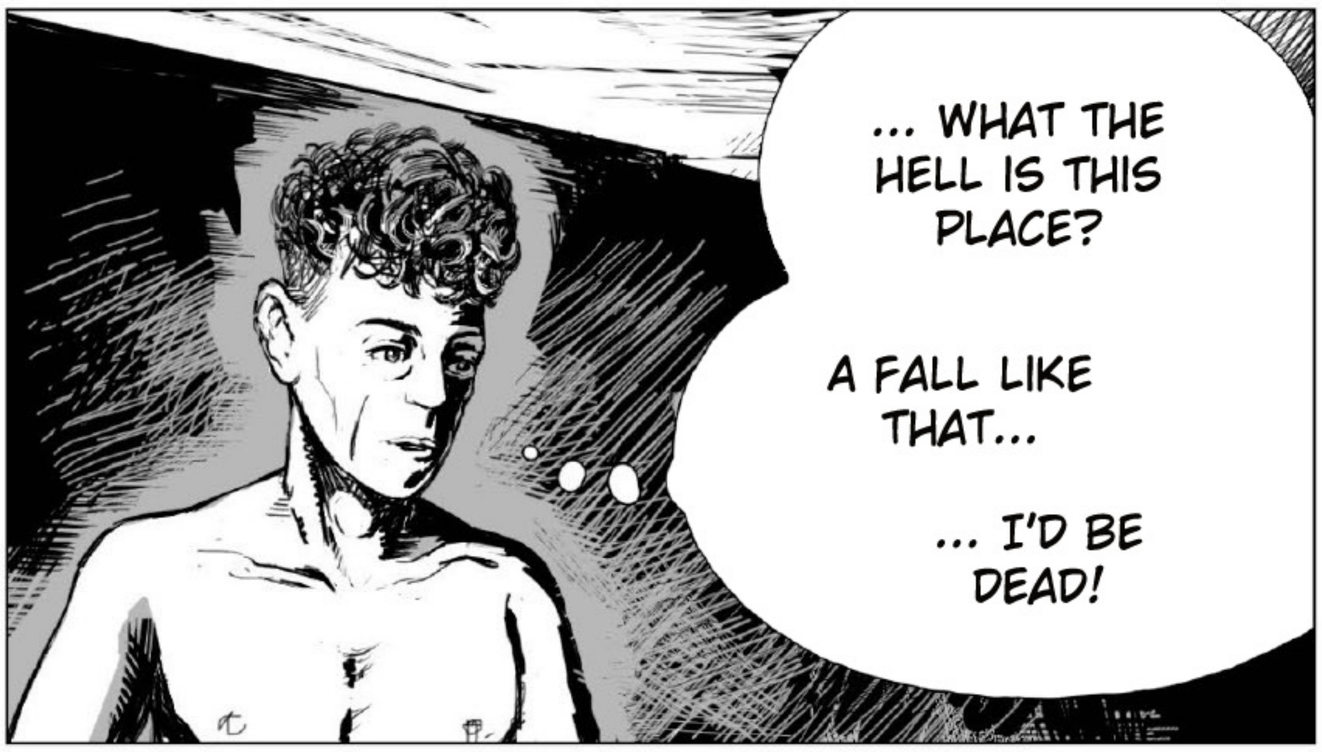
KLANG

NO...

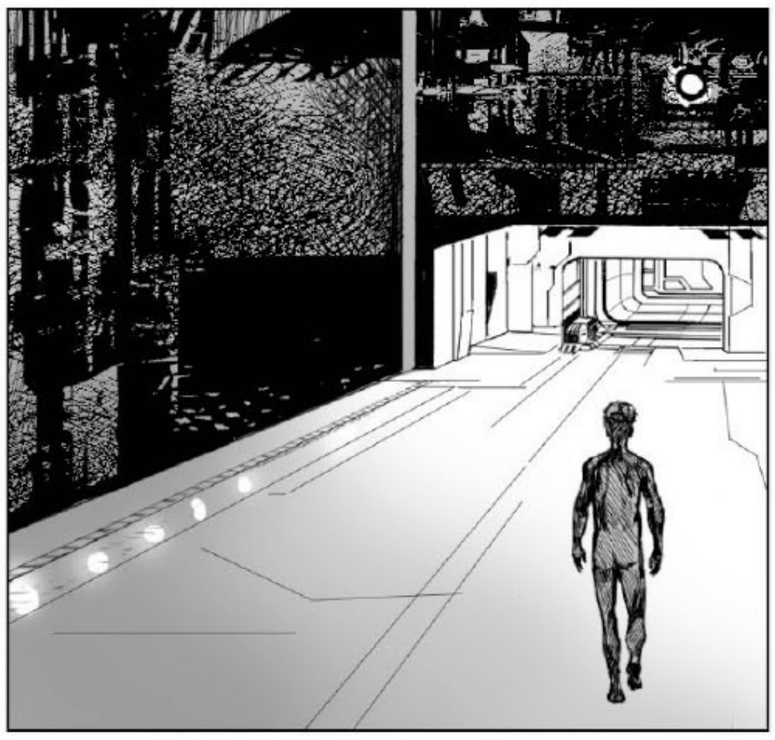
I DON'T...

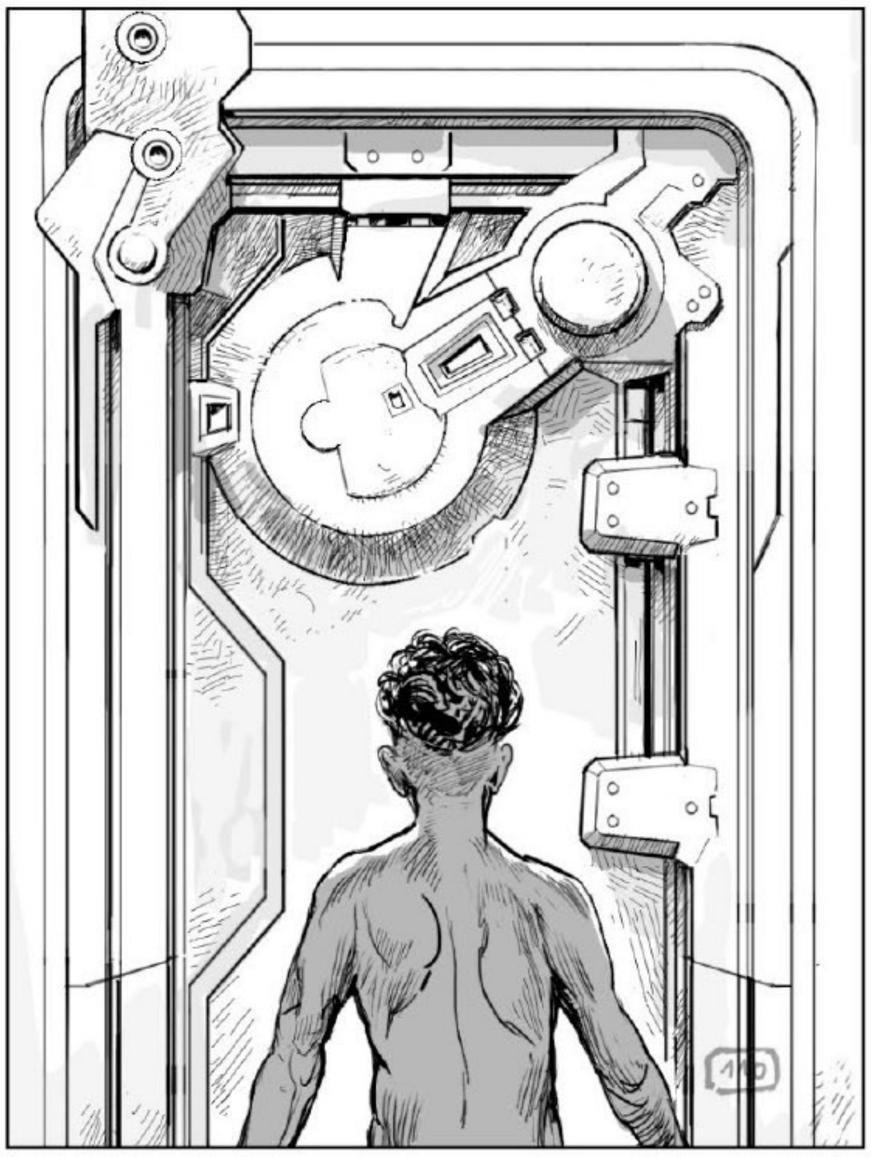
FLASH

... WHAT?


... WHAT THE HELL IS THIS PLACE?
A FALL LIKE THAT...
... I'D BE DEAD!

WHICH MEANS THAT...





MY WELCOME IS BEHIND THAT DOOR... ... WHATEVER IT IS...

VZZZZ

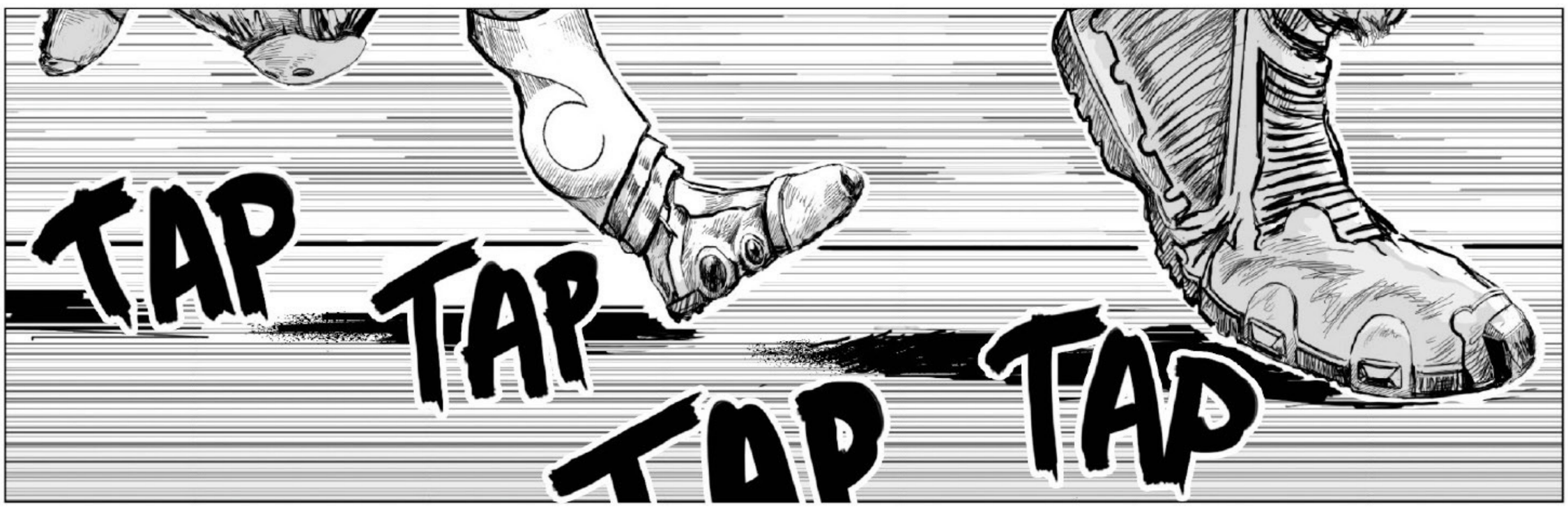
...

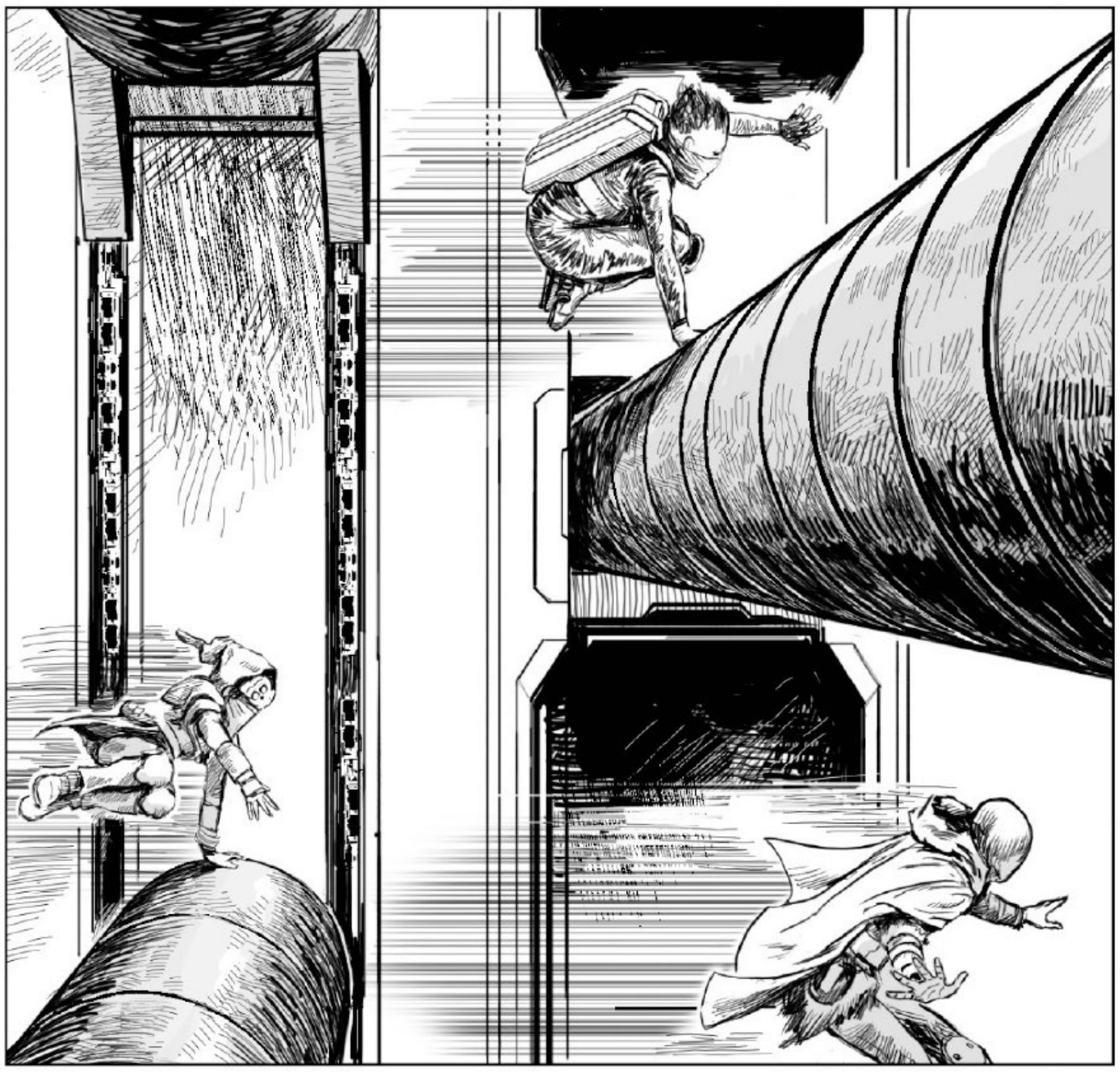
PORO, MY OLD FRIEND... I OWE YOU SO MUCH!

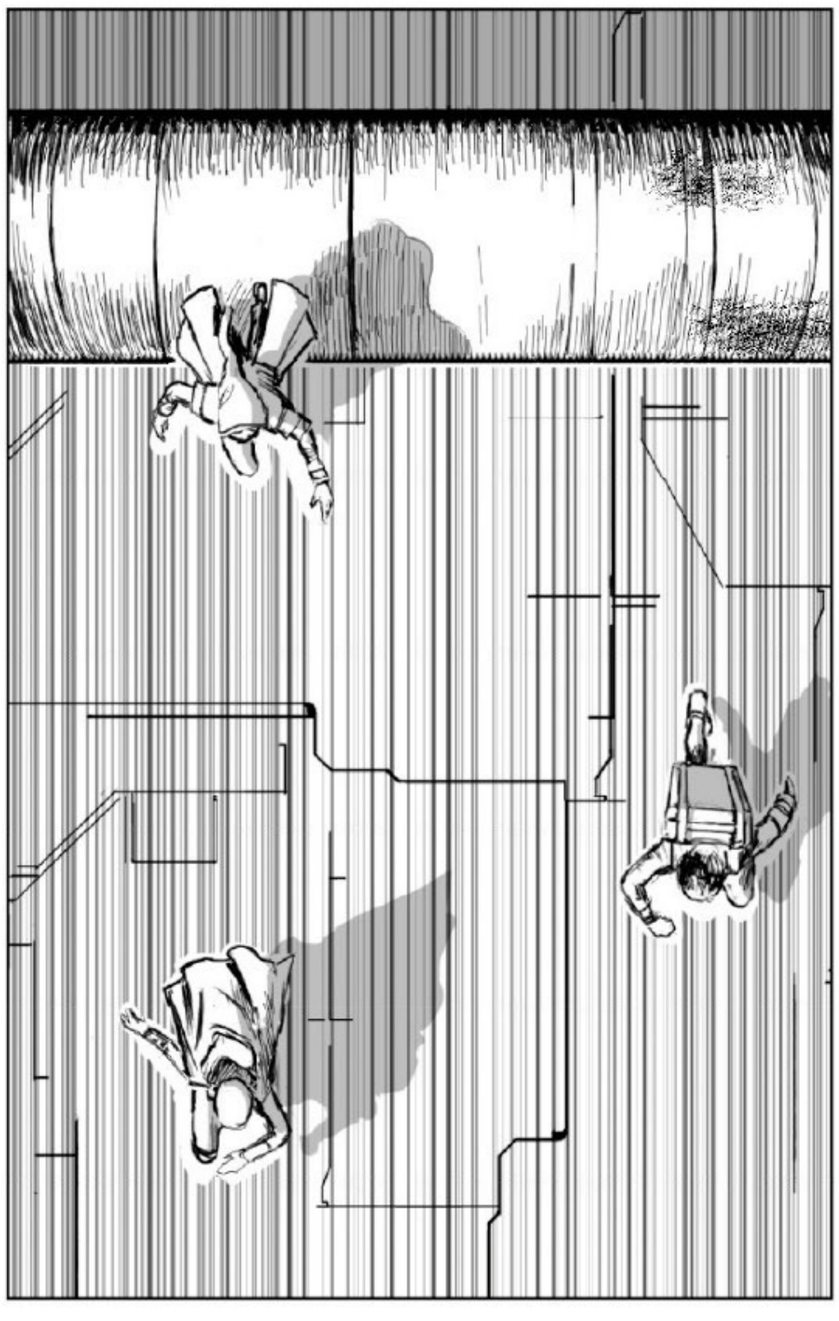
WE'LL SEE EACH OTHER AGAIN SOON, I PROMISE!

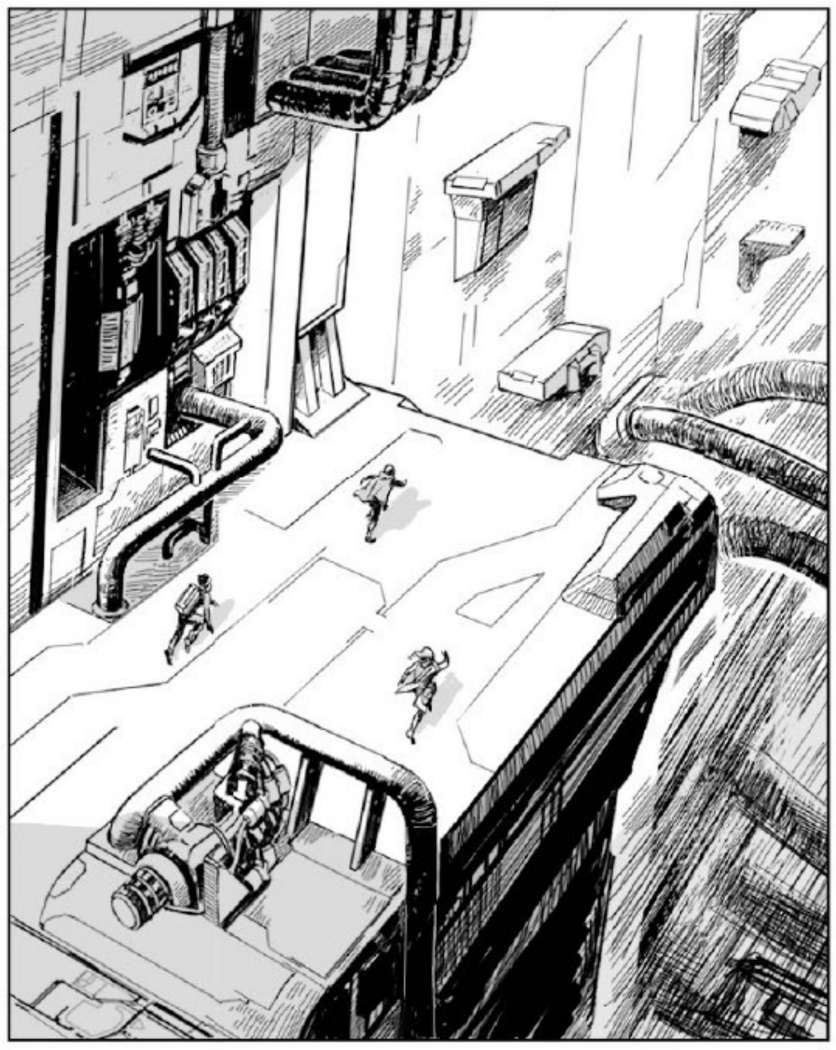
AH! THAT WAS A LONG ONE!

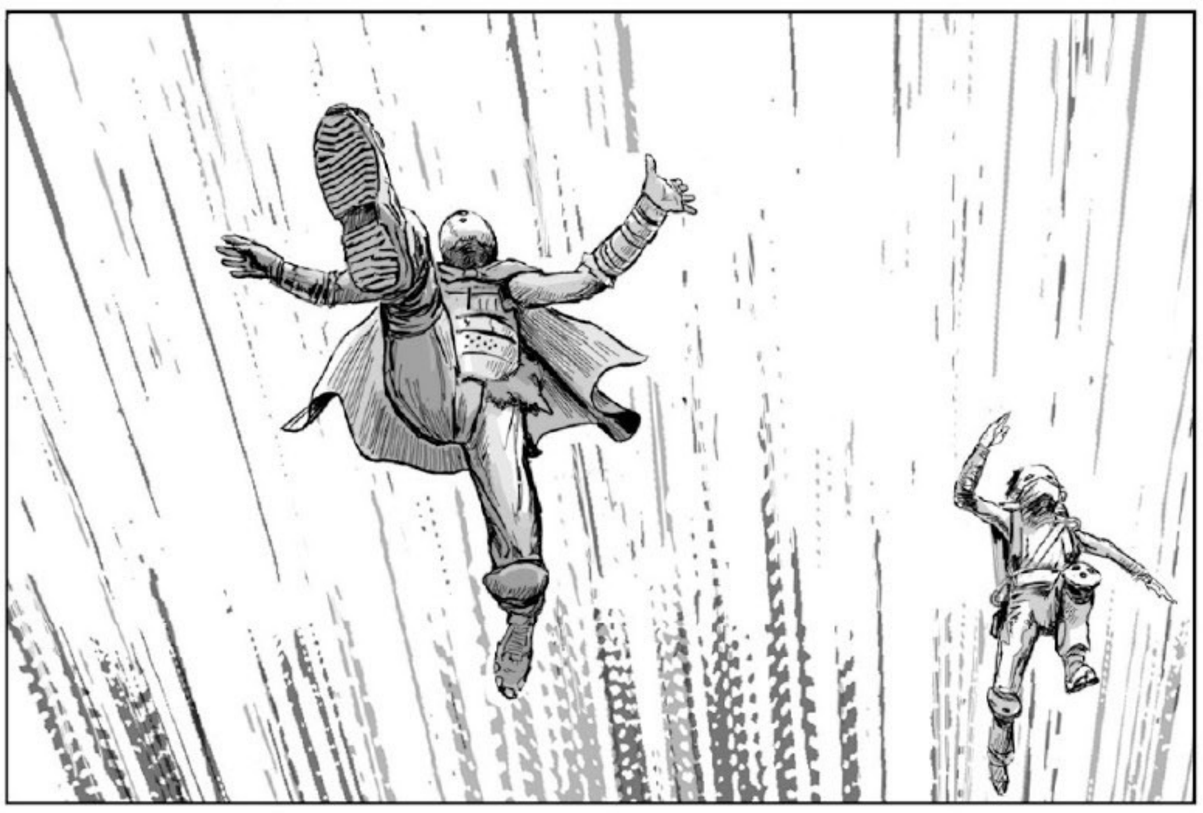
NOT FAR FROM THERE...

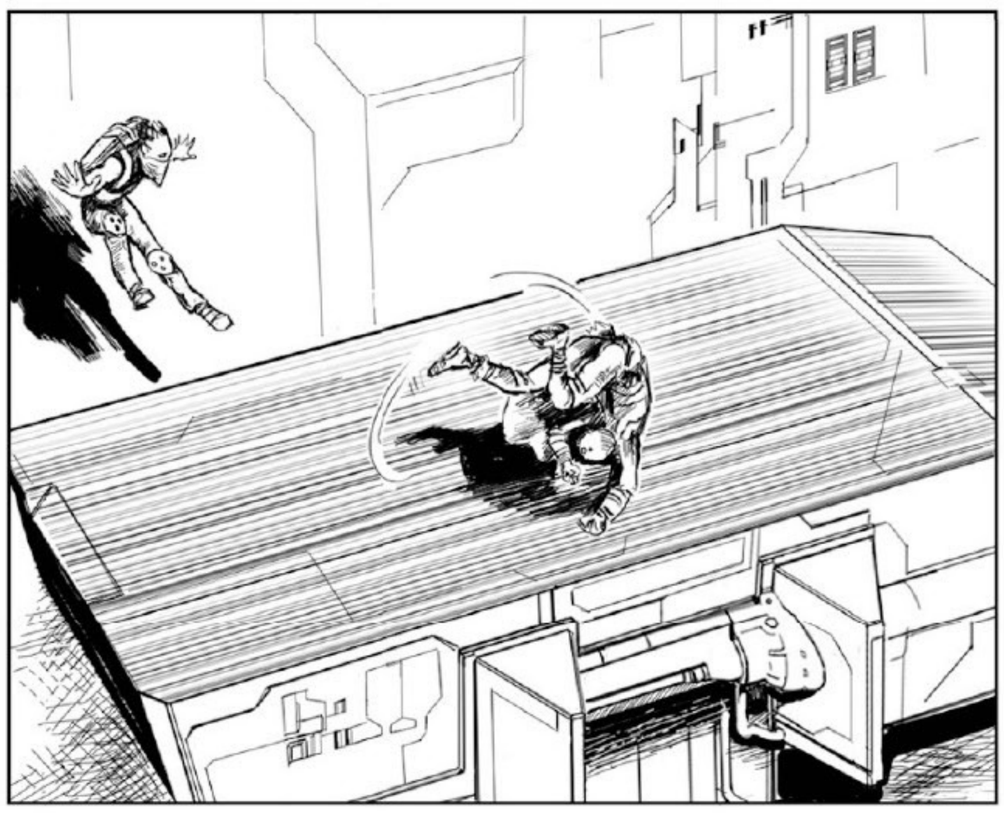

TAP
TAP
TAP
TAPS

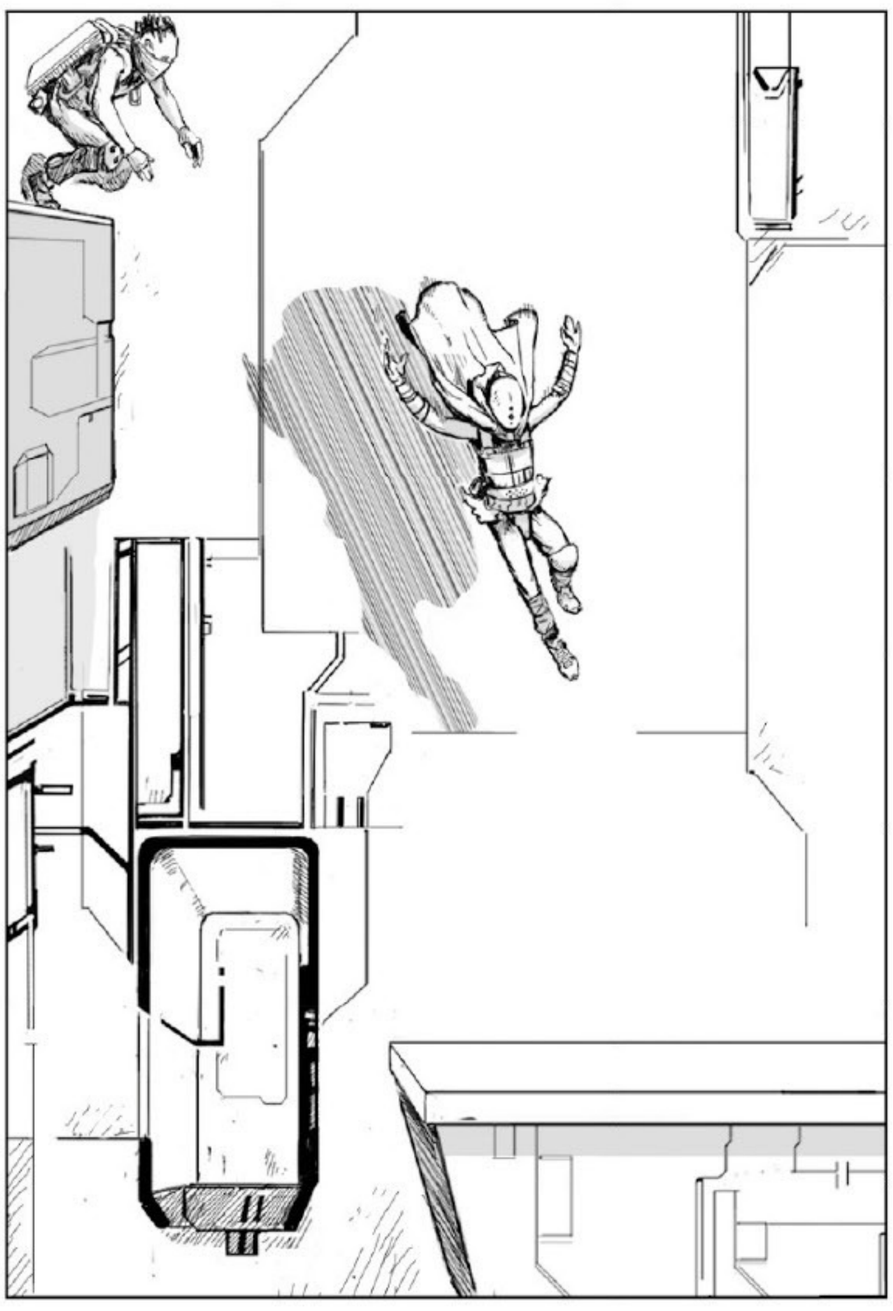


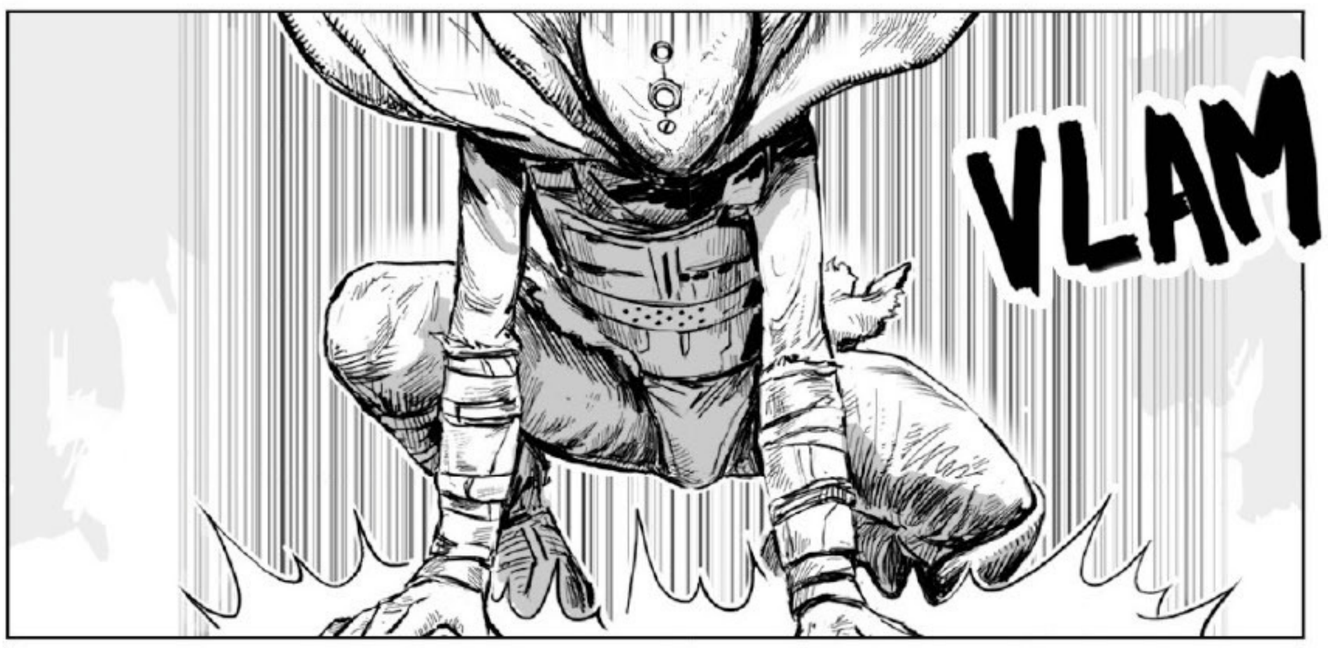











VLAM

THE LIGHT LEAVES HERE.

FASS, LIGHT YOURS!

'KAY!

YOU SURE-SURE WE HAVE TO GO HERE, SHEB?

DON'T LIKE ALL BLACK...

NO FEAR, LIL SIS!

SHEB AND FASS HAVE THEIR LIGHT...

AND YOU HAVE BIG HEAD'S GIZMO.

TIP

TIP

AND THIS WAY'S FASTER.

WHAT IF THERE'S DRONES? OR UGLIES?

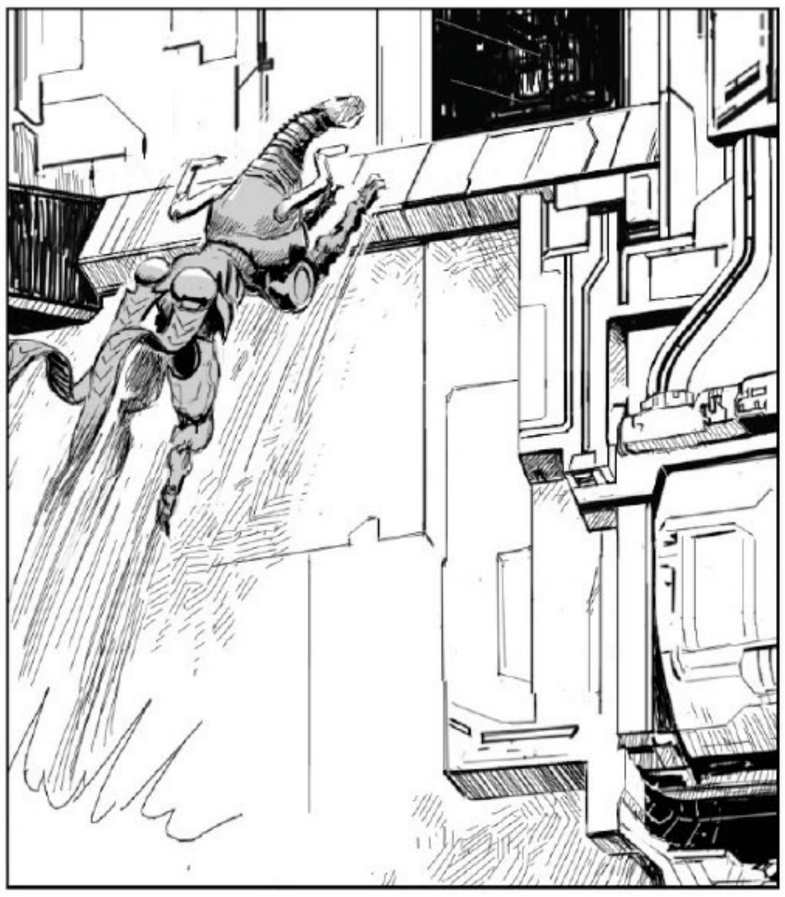
WE'RE FASTER THAN THEM STUPIDIOTS!

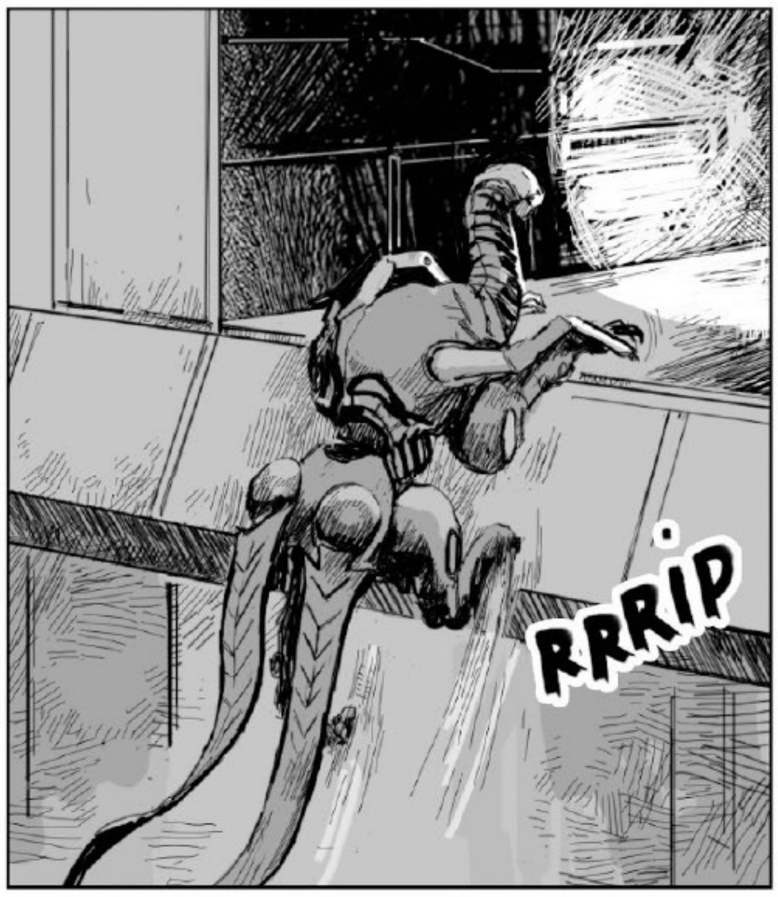
DEEKA SCARED!

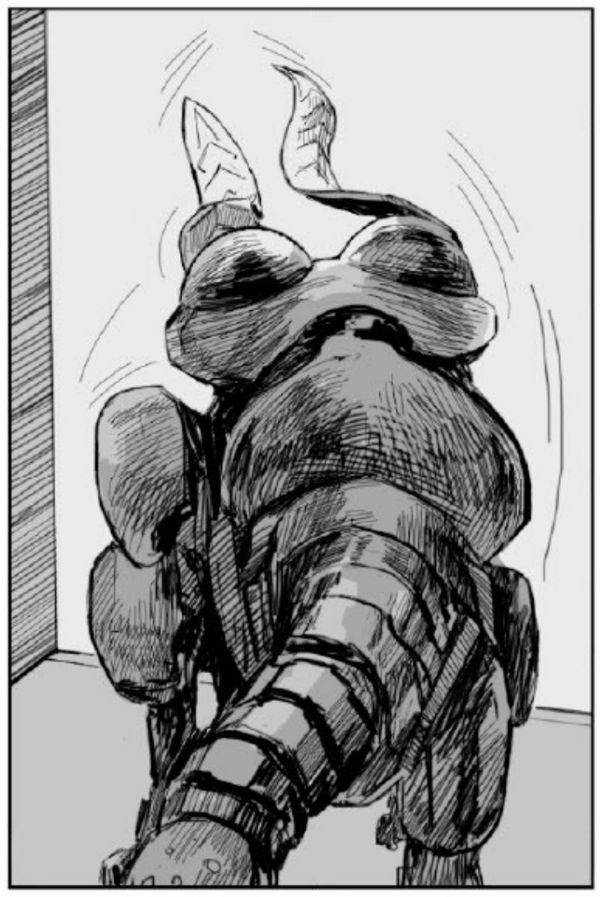
SHKRRR

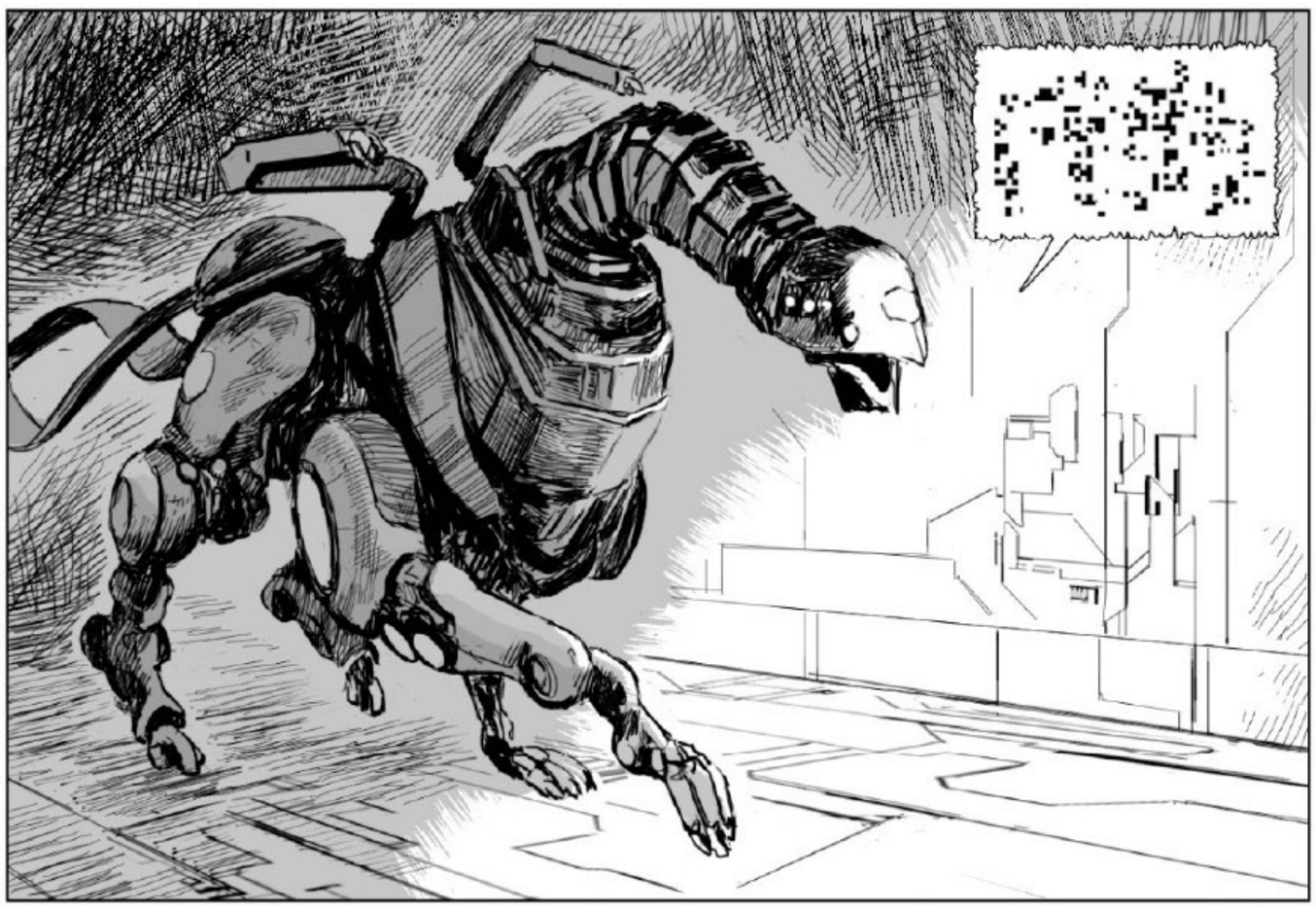
CLIC

CLIC




RRRIP





-ik...

THUD

YOU SEE, DEEKA? THEY'RE ALL THICK! LIKE SHEB SAYS!

COME ON!

NOT FAR.

THERE! FOLLOW!

HOP!

WAIT!

?

WHAT DO YOU SEE, DEEKA?

THERE, A CARCASS.

AH, YEAH!

A CARCASS ISN'T SO BAD, LIL SIS!

BUT IT'S NOT THE COLOUR OF CARCASSES.

?

YOU SURE? THEN IT'S AN UGLY?

NOT THE COLOUR OF AN UGLY. JUST AN ANIMAL COLOUR.

DEEKA CRAZY.

COME ON, LET'S GO SEE...

I'M NOT CRAZY, IDIOT!

SMELLS LIKE A CARCASS DOESN'T IT...

SHHHH! THERE'S ANIMALS...

THEY'RE THE SAME COLOUR.

SNIF

!

THUD

KRiiiiii

CRUNK

CRAC

SLUP

HAHAHA! IT'S NOT A CARCASS!

IT'S A DEAD-LIAR!

JUST PRE-TENDING!

ALRIGHT, WE'RE FAR ENOUGH.

YOU GOT BIG HEAD'S LIST, FASS?

WE HAVE TO BRING BACK THIS STUFF OR THAT STUPIDIOT'LL BE MAD!

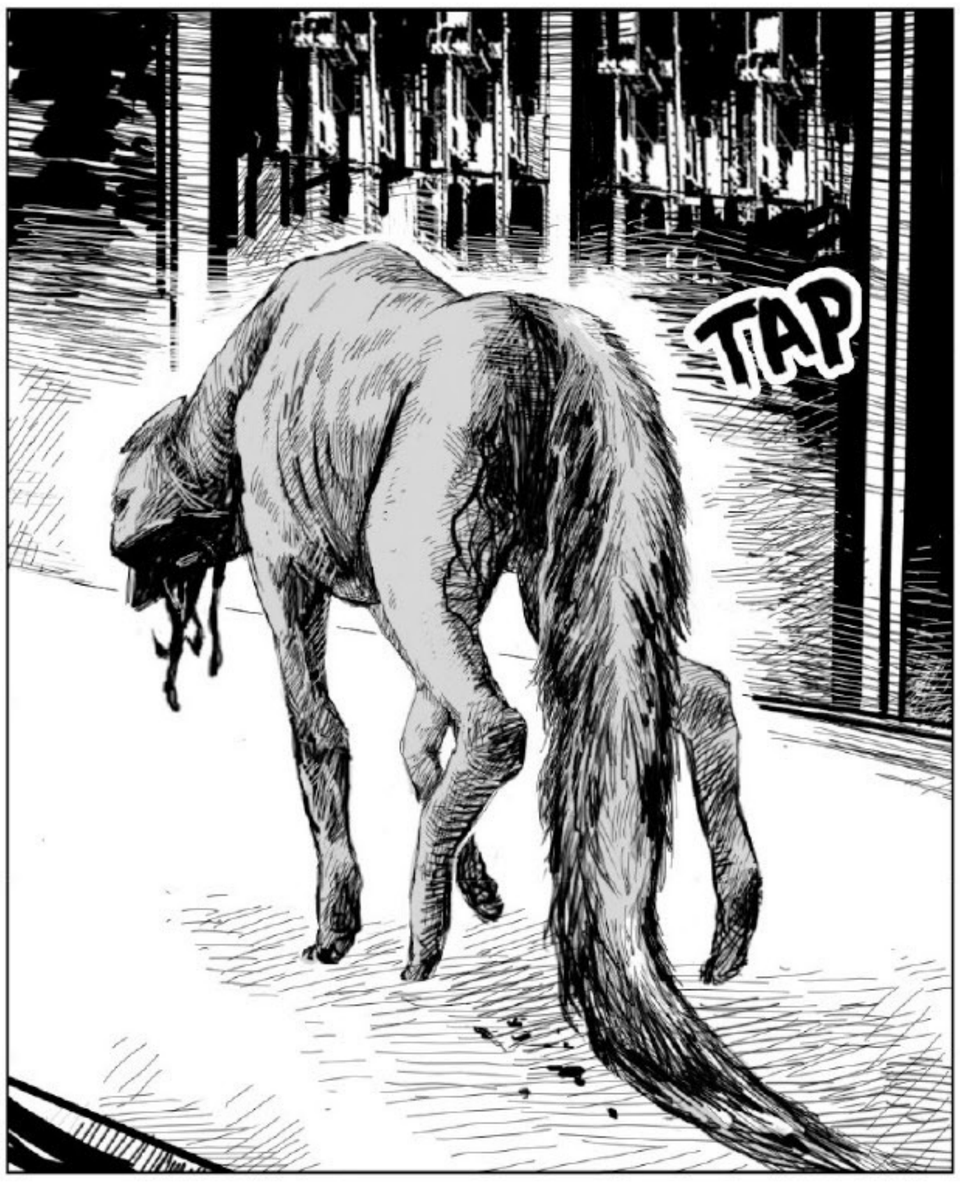
COME ON, I KNOW WHERE THEY ARE...!

HAHAHA! A DEAD-LIAR...

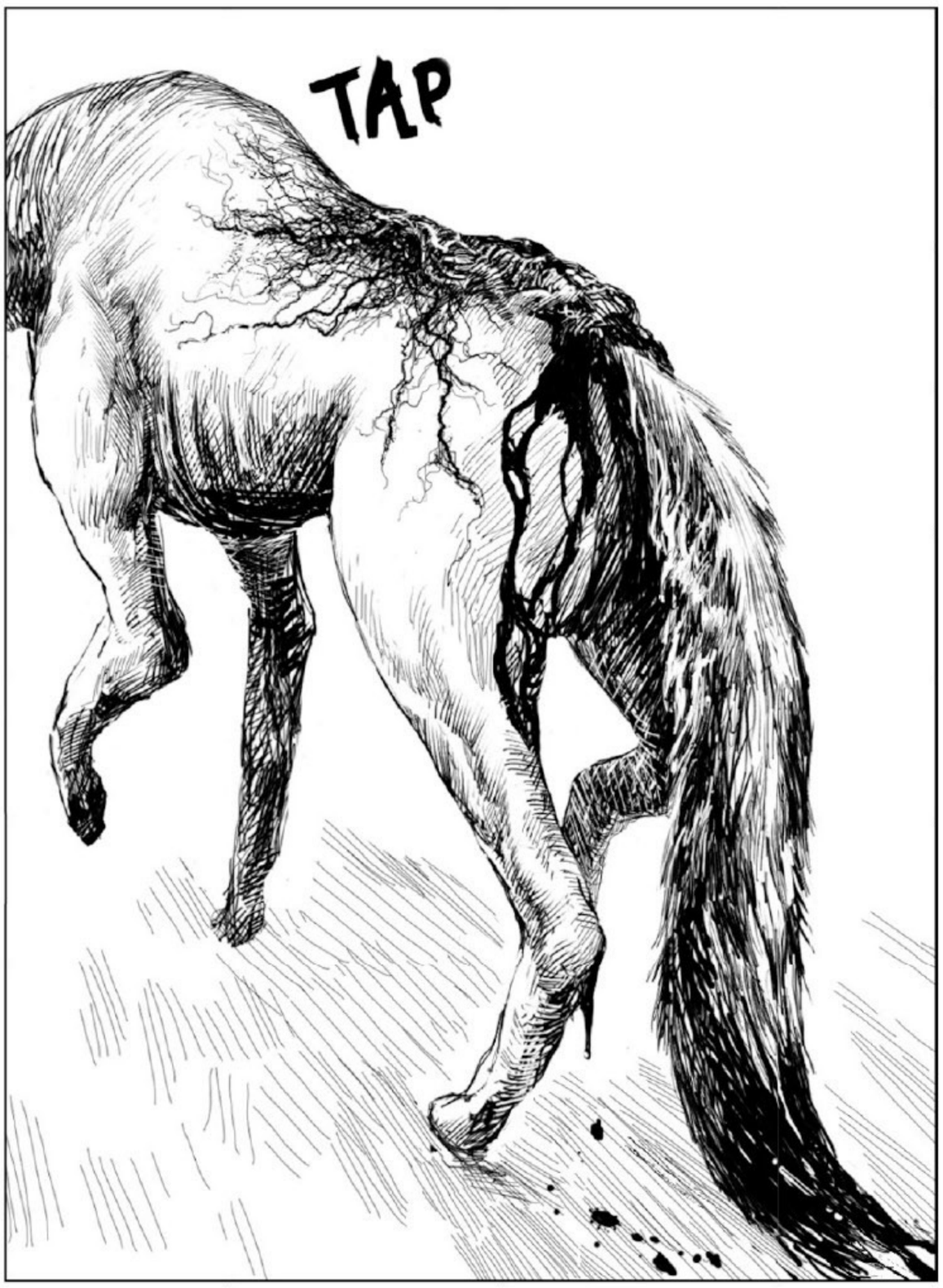
TOO LOUD!

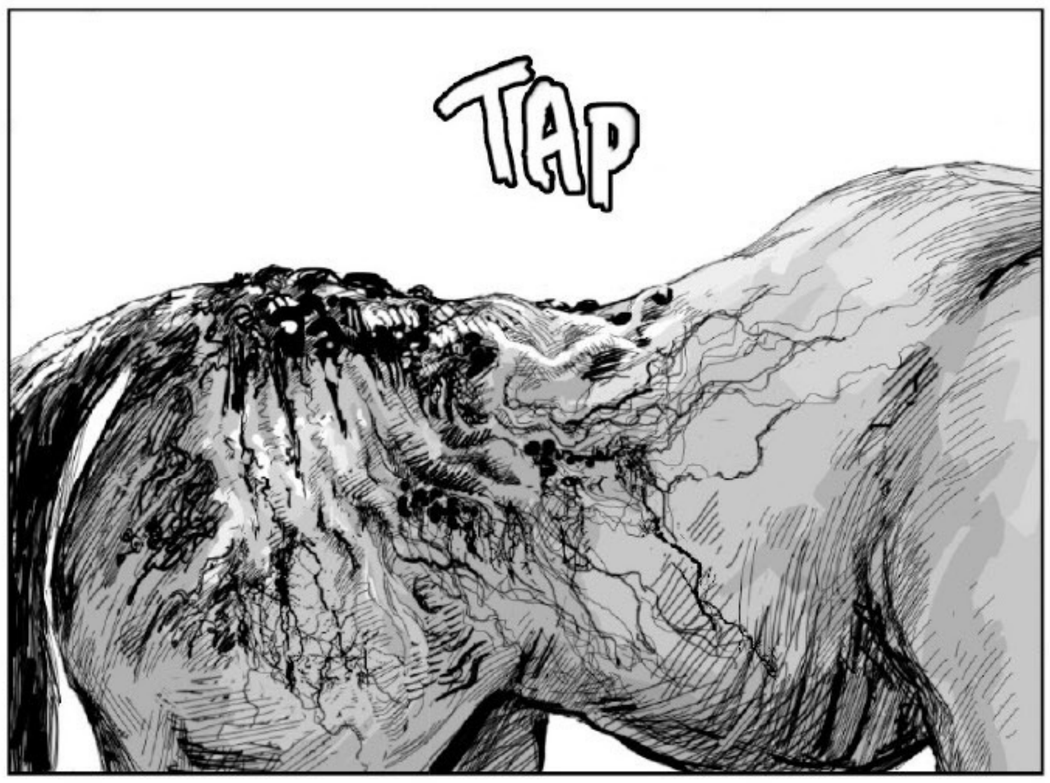
TAP

TAP


TAP

SHHHHHH


TAP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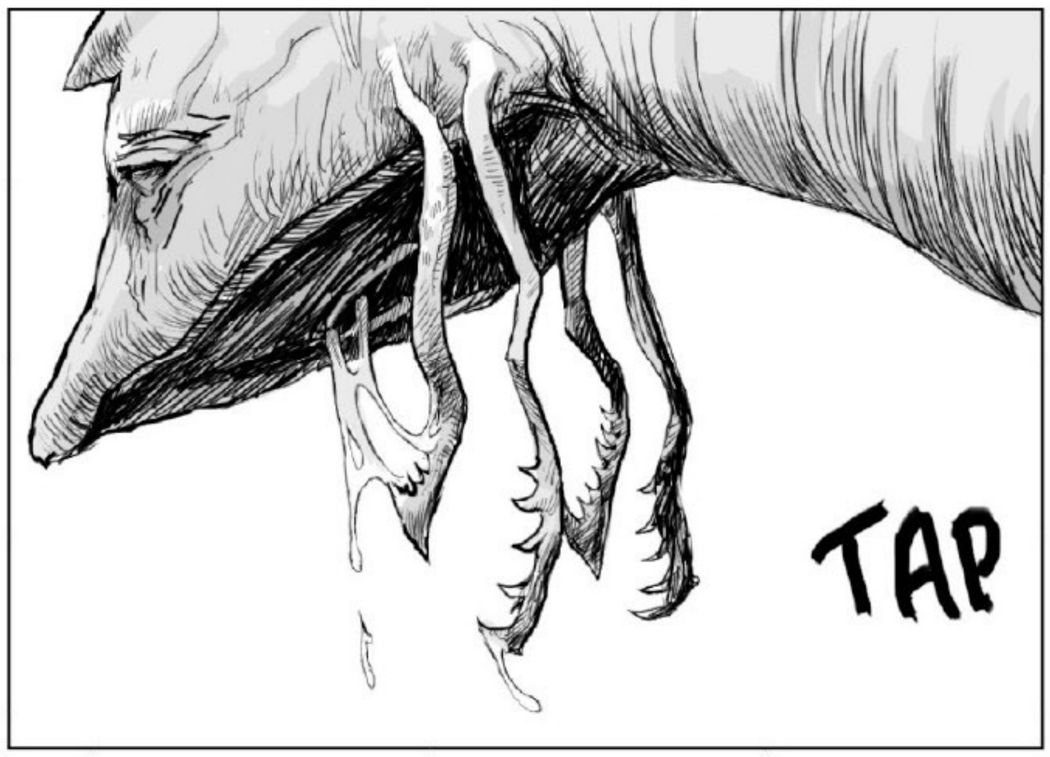
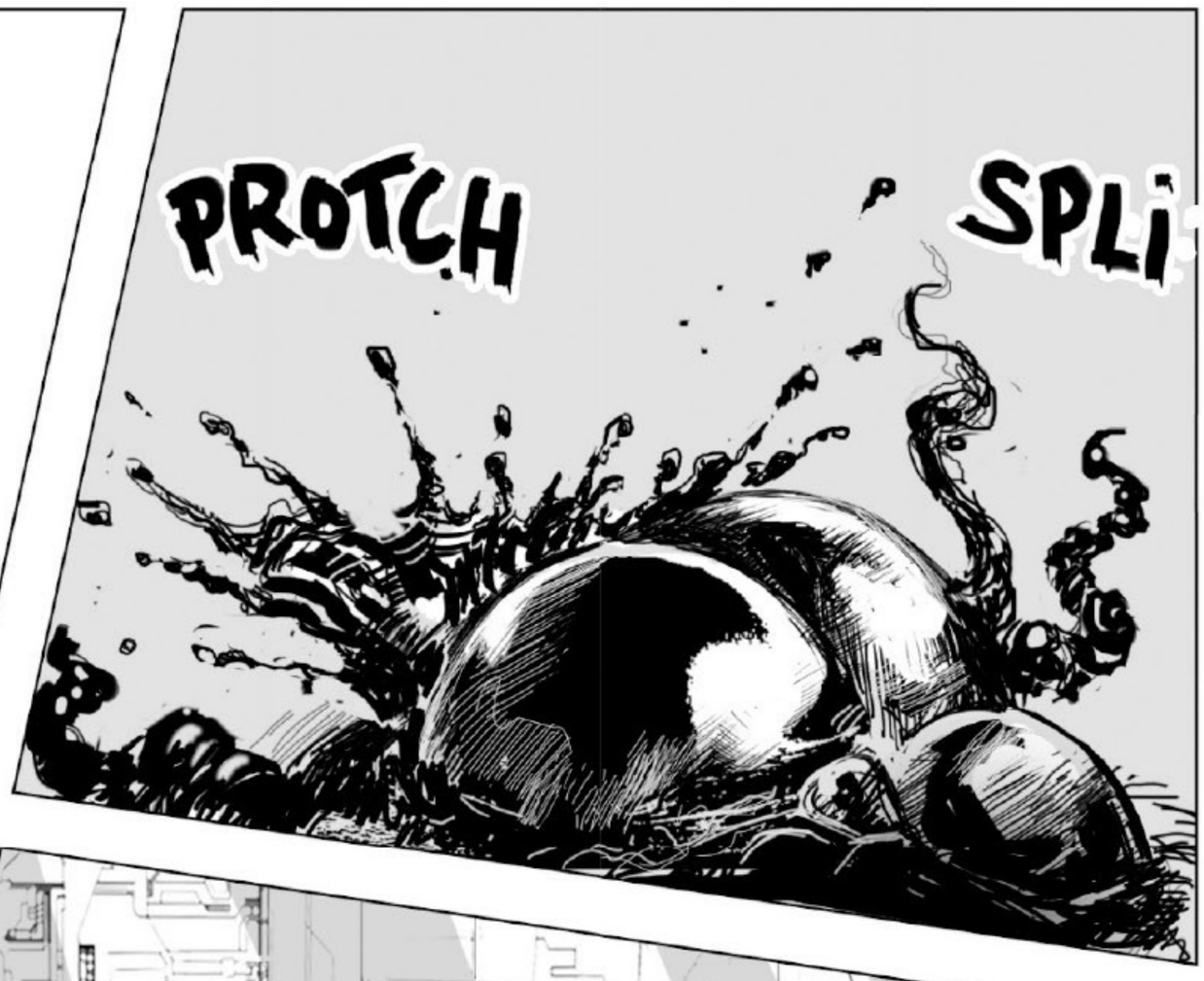
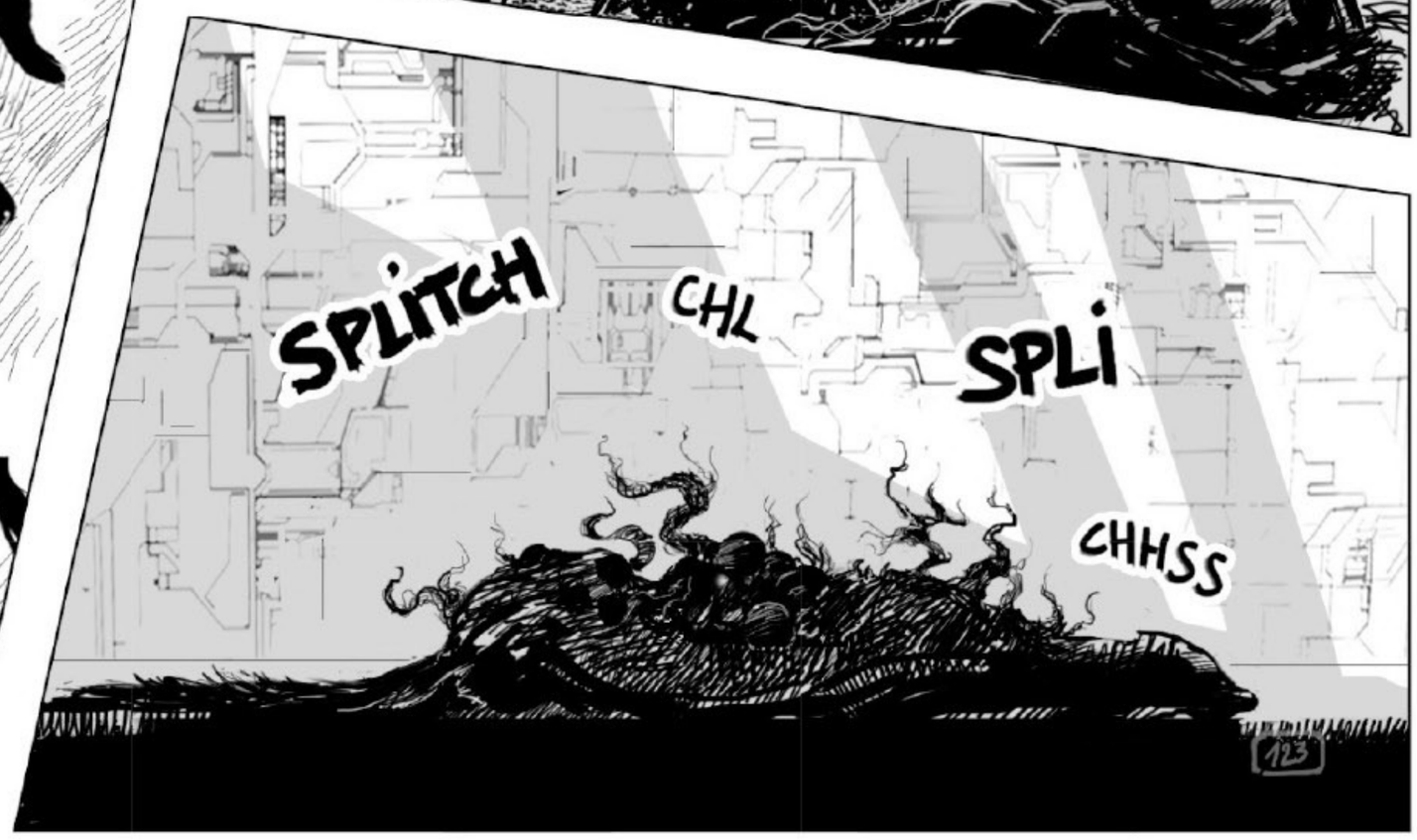
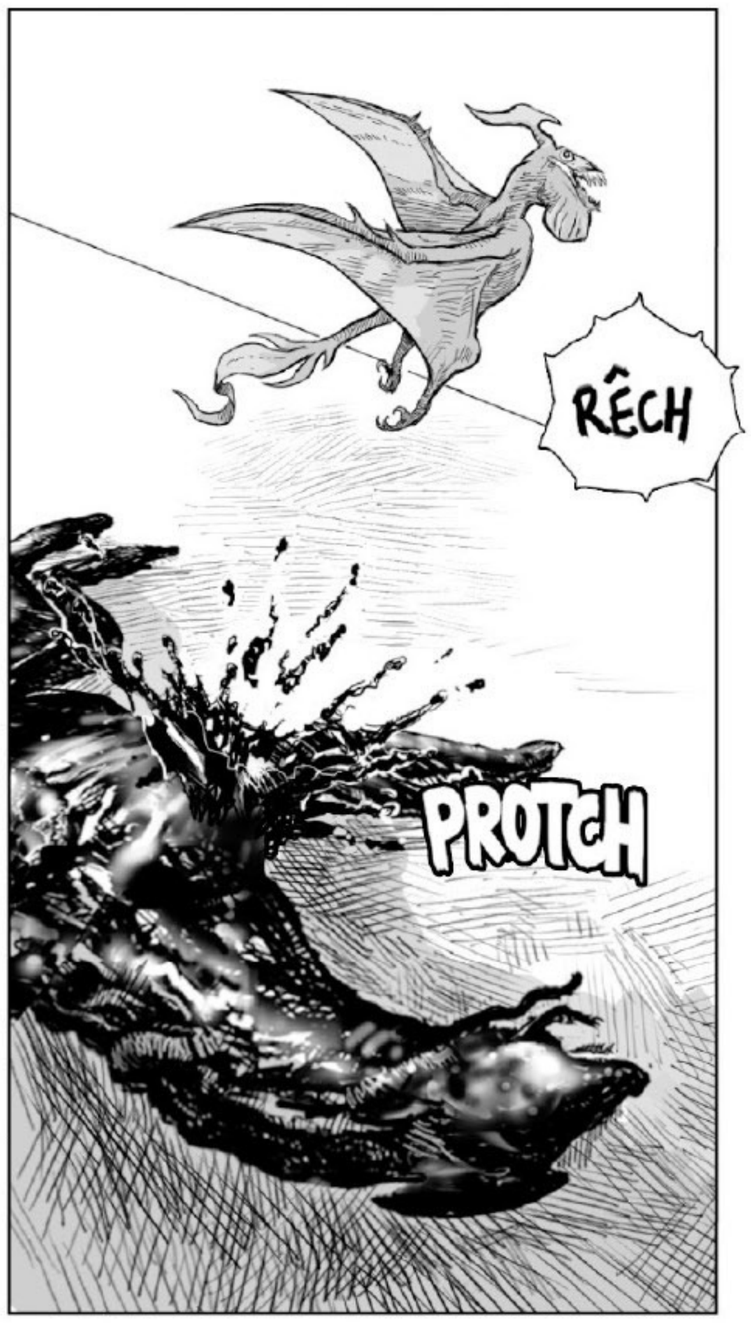

TAP

TAP

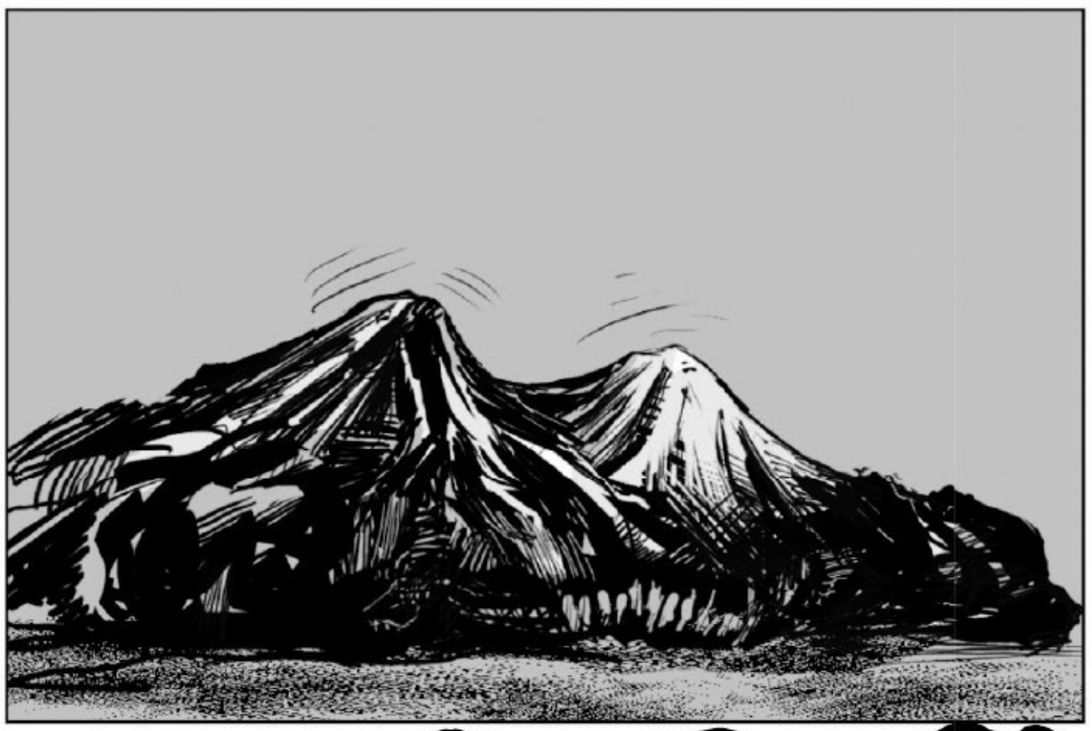
HHHHHHHHH

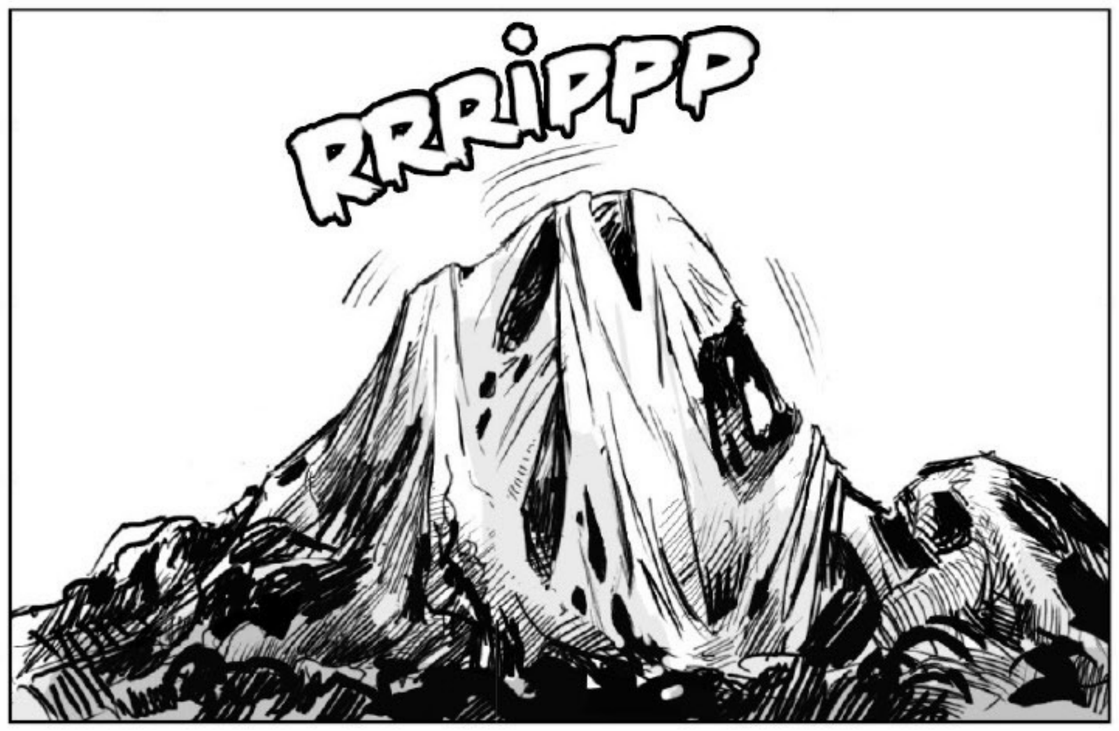

PROTCH
SPLi

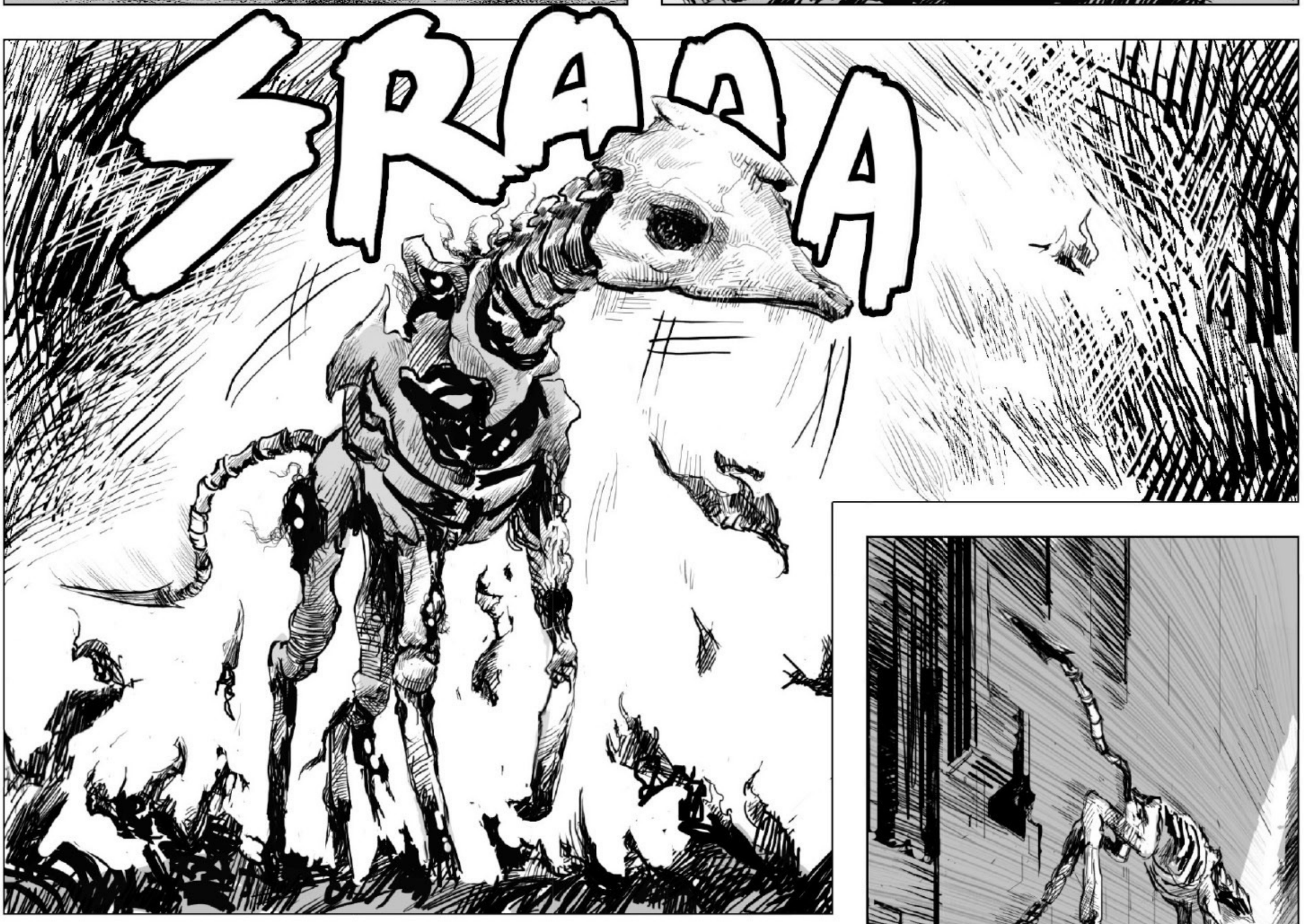

SPLITCH
CHL
SPLi
CHHSS


RÊCH
PROTCH

RËK
RËK




RRRIPPP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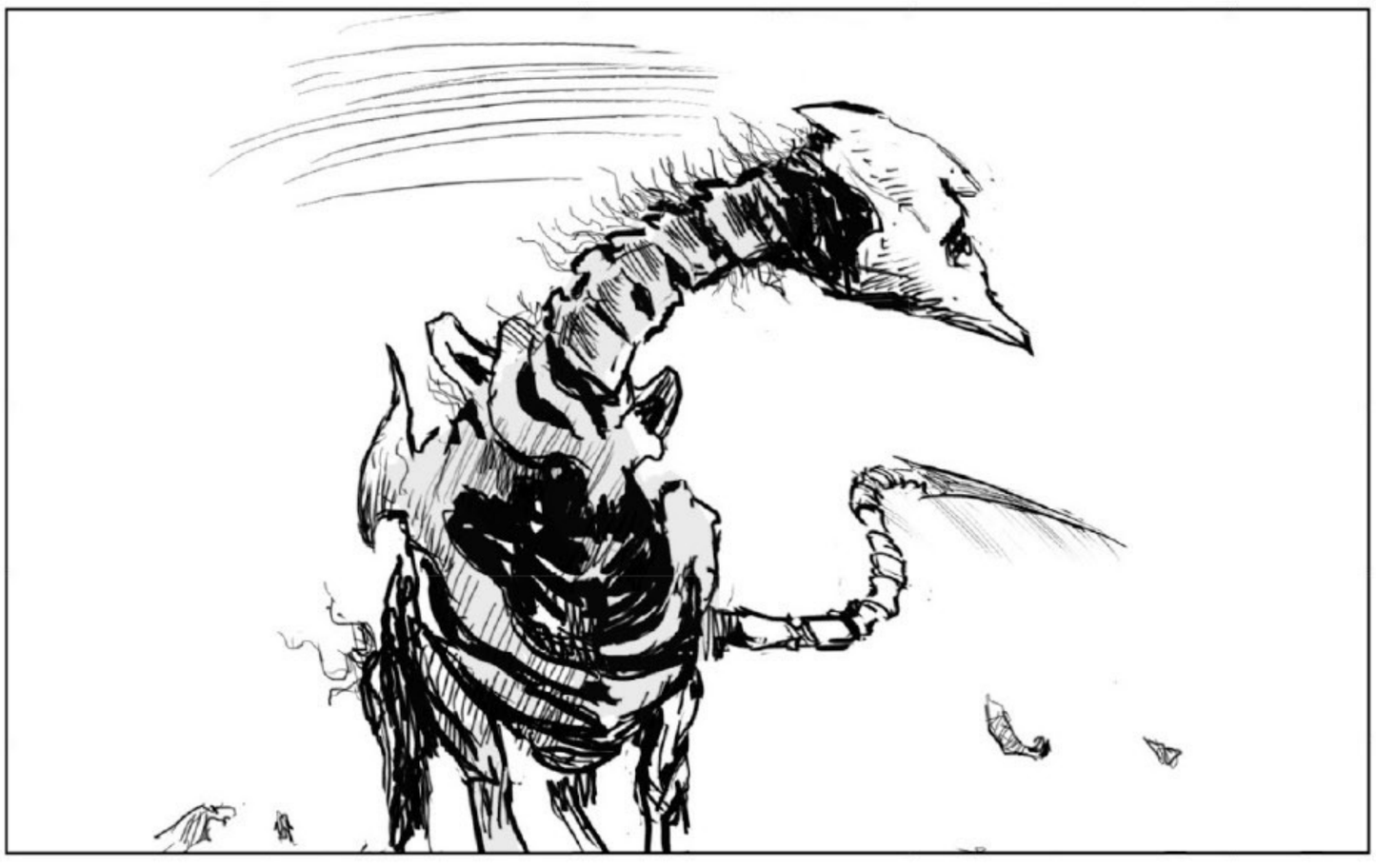

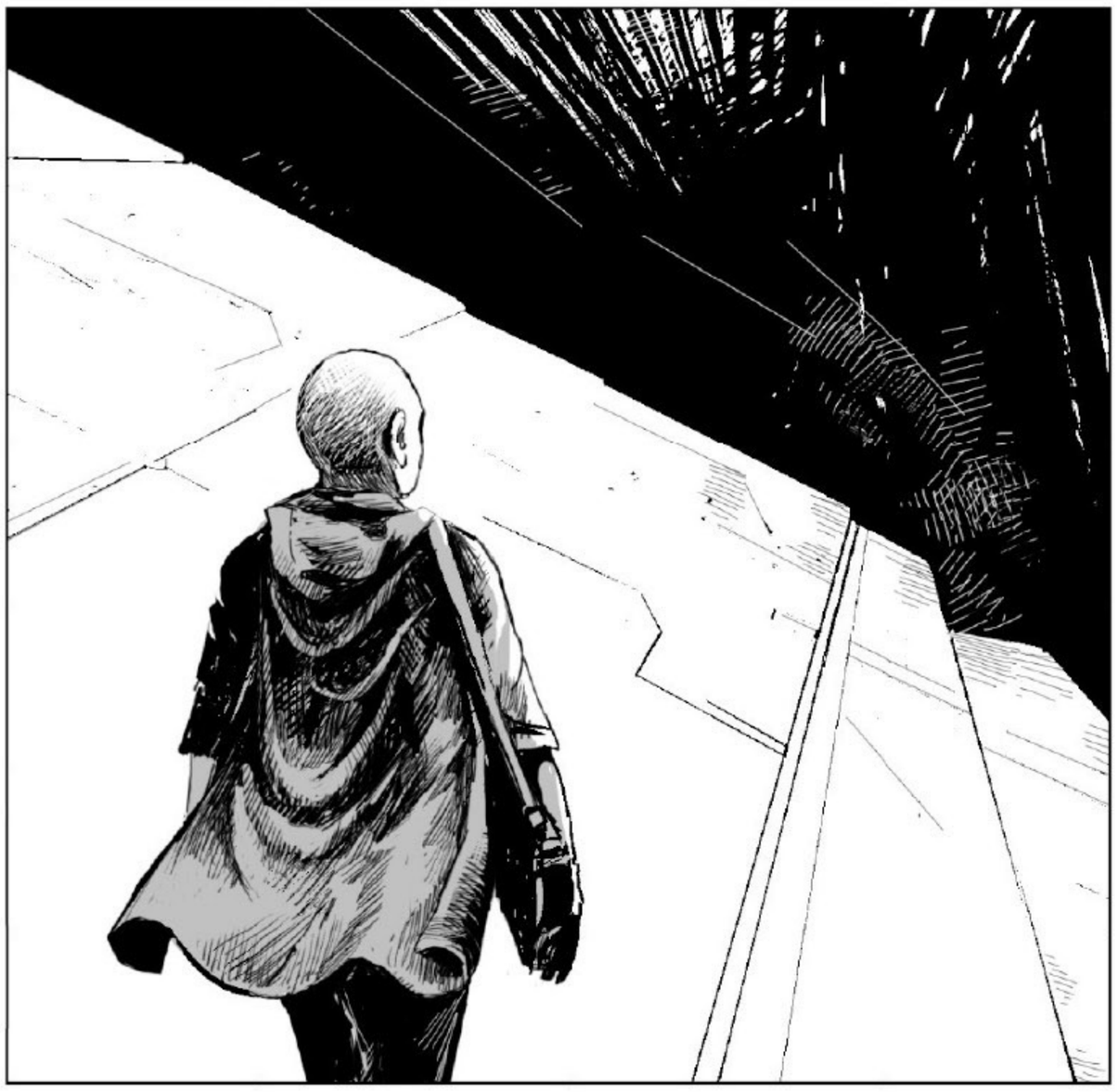

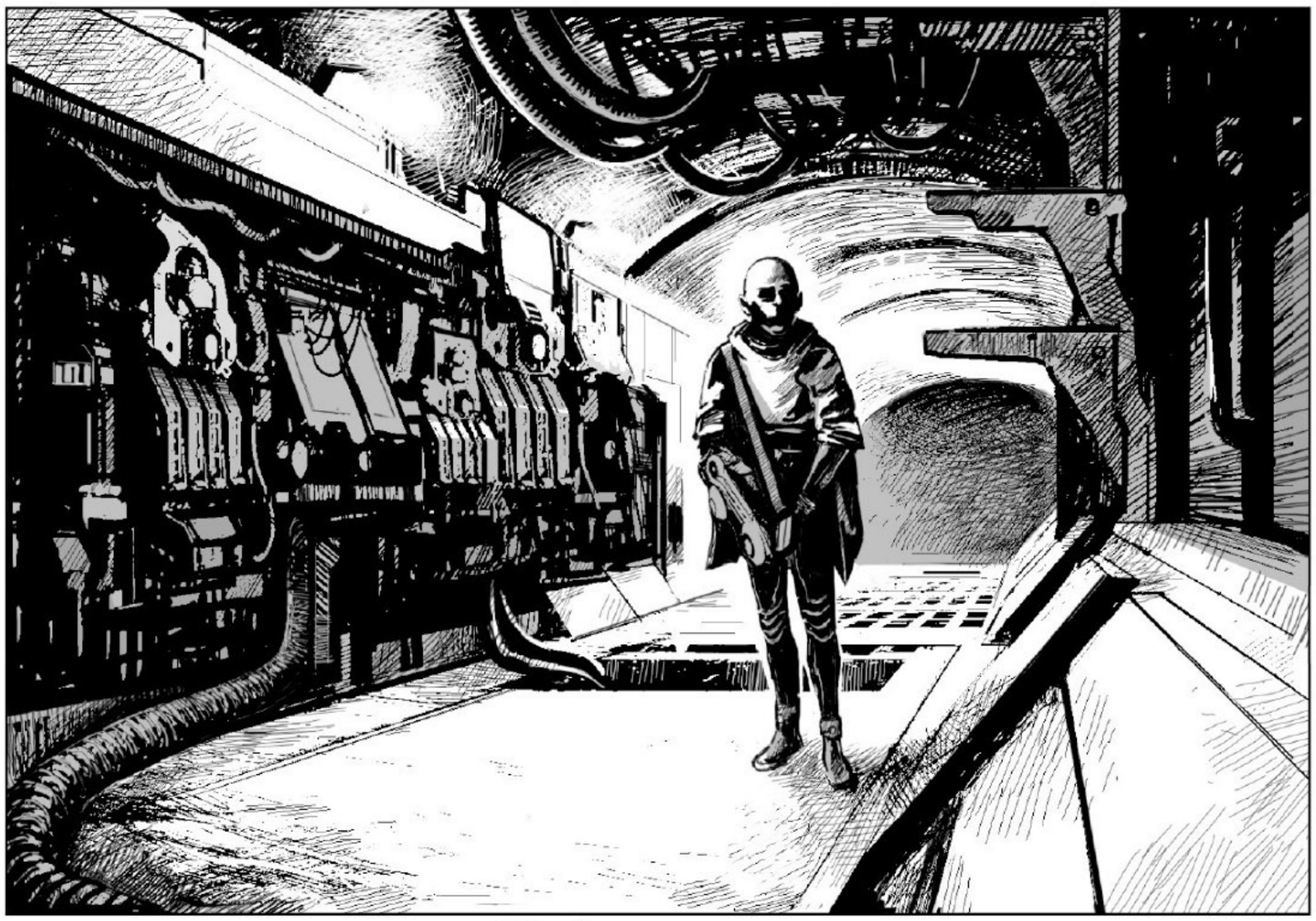

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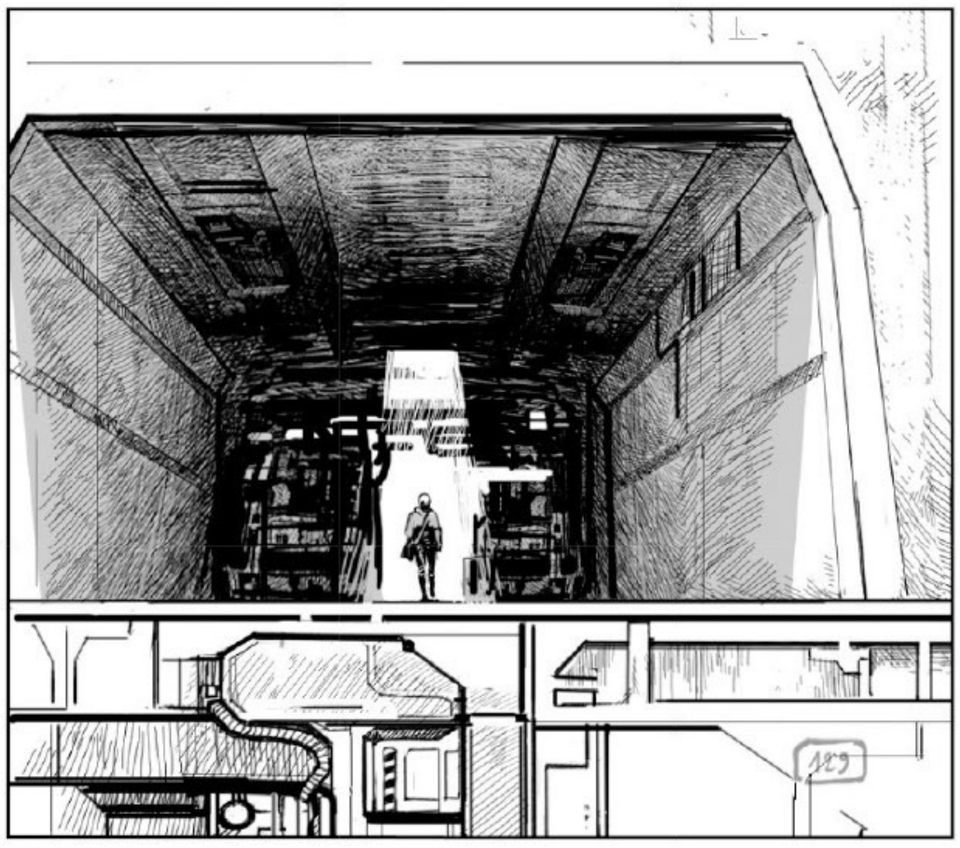
IZZ

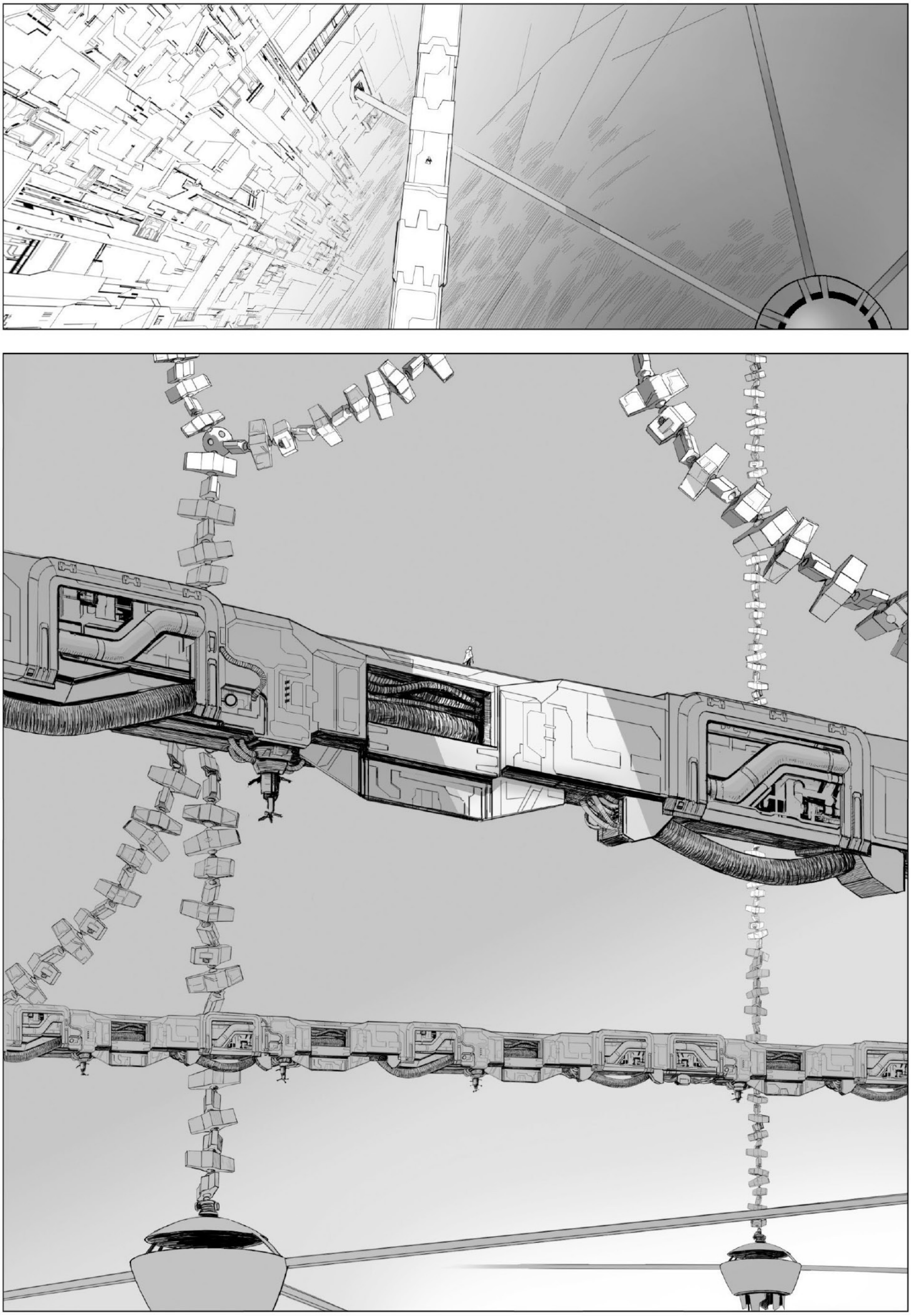
FWiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii

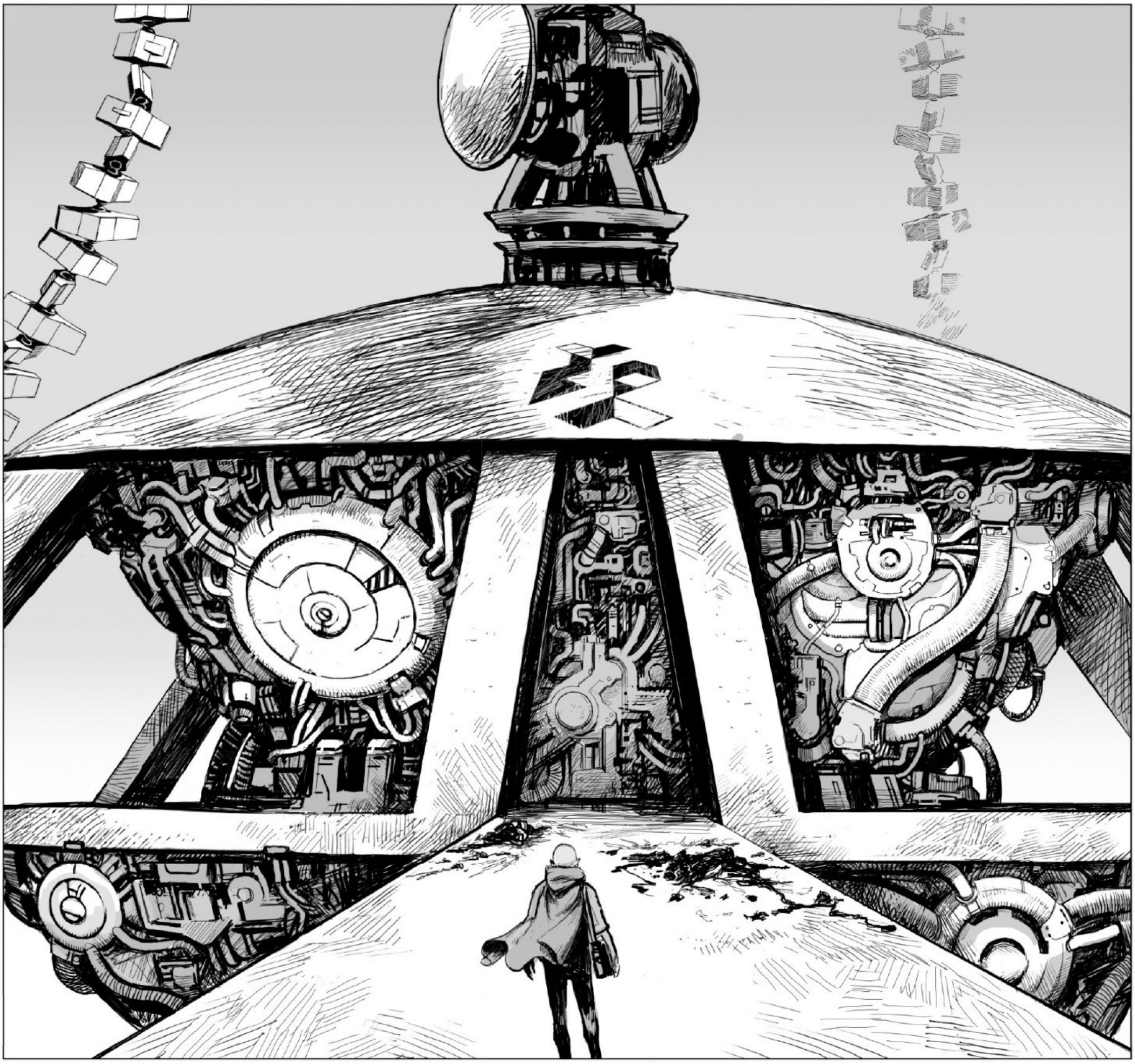
FWOOOOOOOO

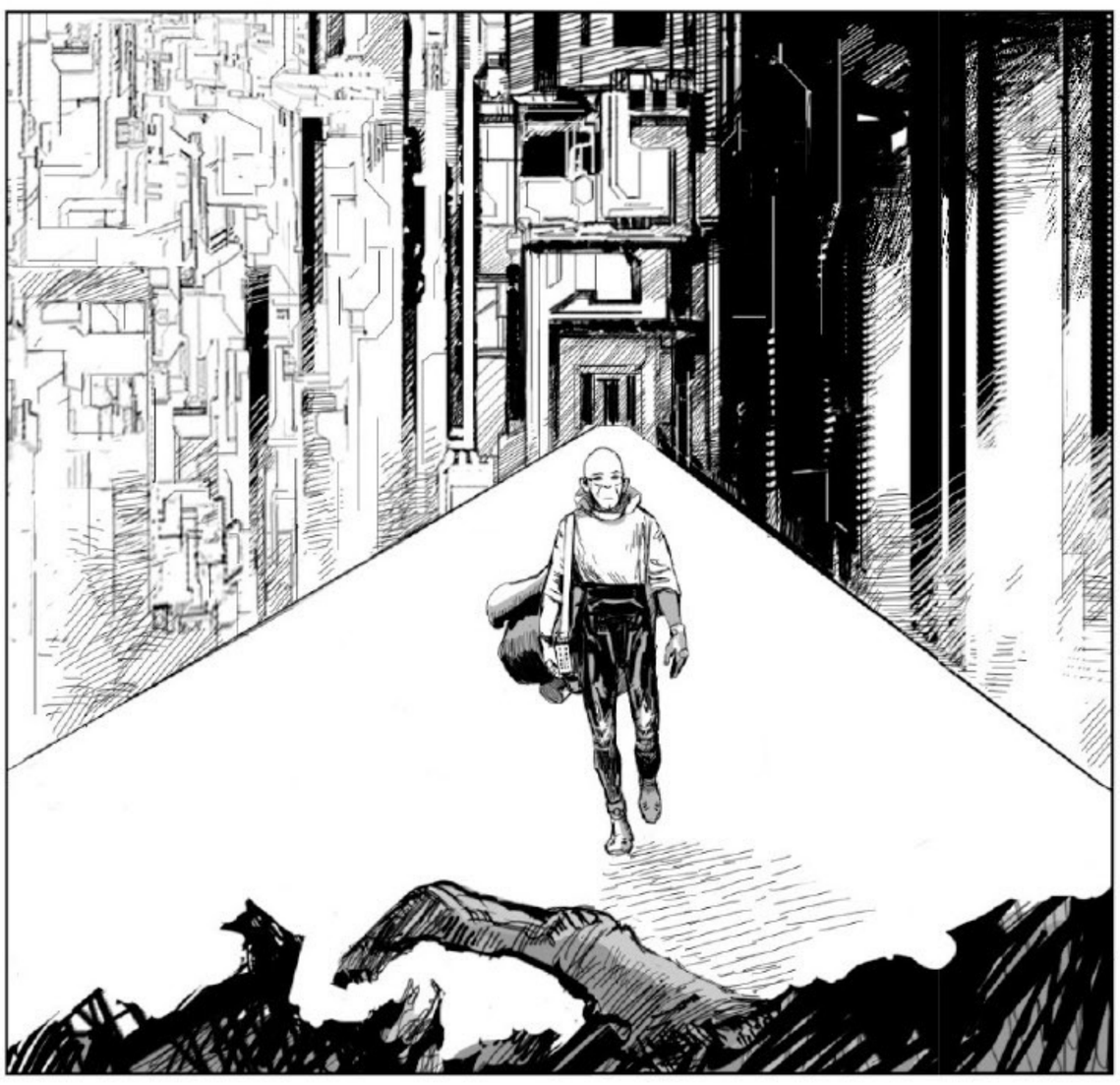
FWIII

KLANG



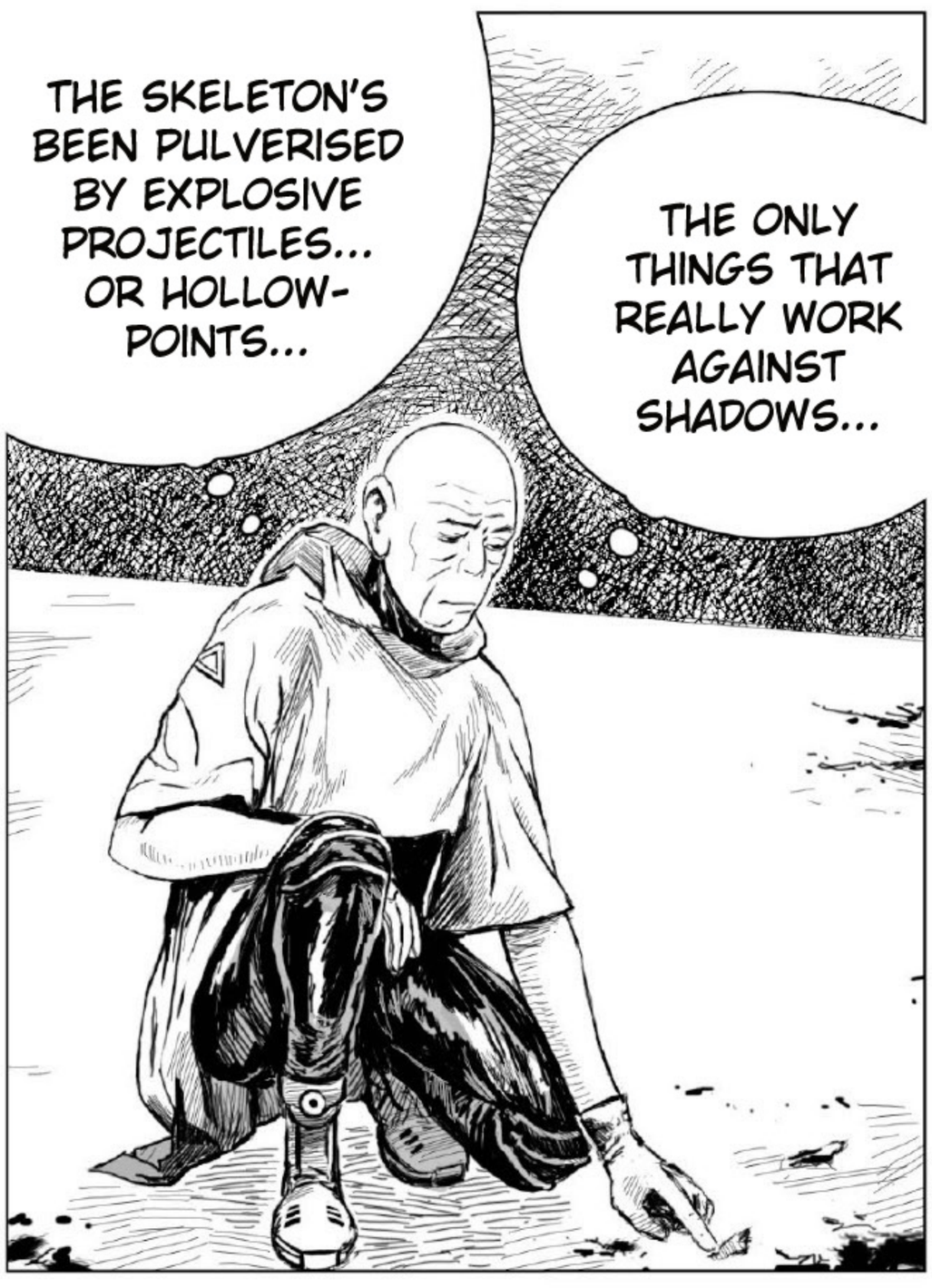


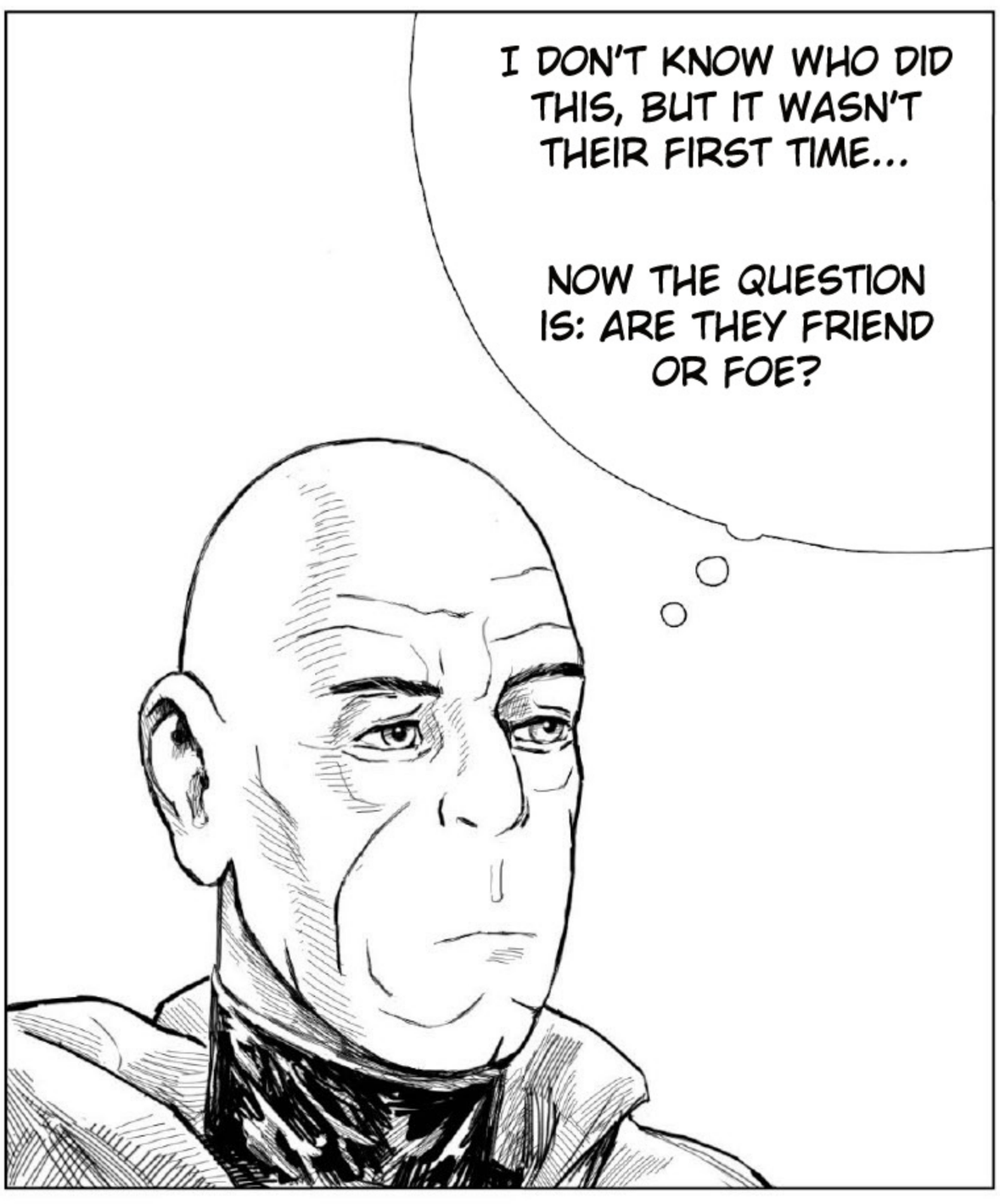




TAP
131

WELL, WELL, BONEHEAD, DID WE HIT A SNAG?


THE SKELETON'S BEEN PULVERISED BY EXPLOSIVE PROJECTILES... OR HOLLOW-POINTS...
THE ONLY THINGS THAT REALLY WORK AGAINST SHADOWS...


I DON'T KNOW WHO DID THIS, BUT IT WASN'T THEIR FIRST TIME...
NOW THE QUESTION IS: ARE THEY FRIEND OR FOE?

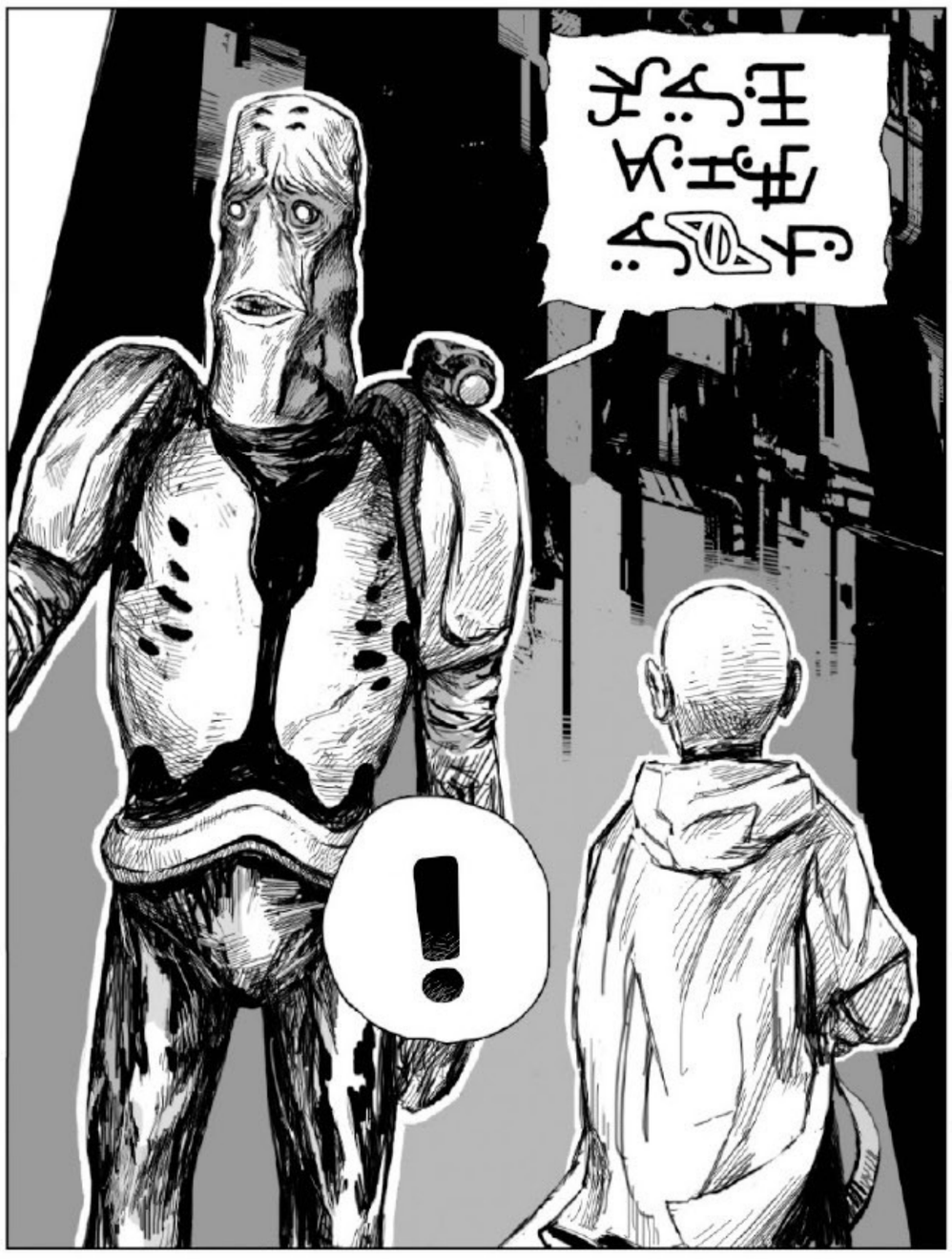
TAKE THE SHOT?

NO! WAIT FOR A BETTER ANGLE...

!

KLENG

TAP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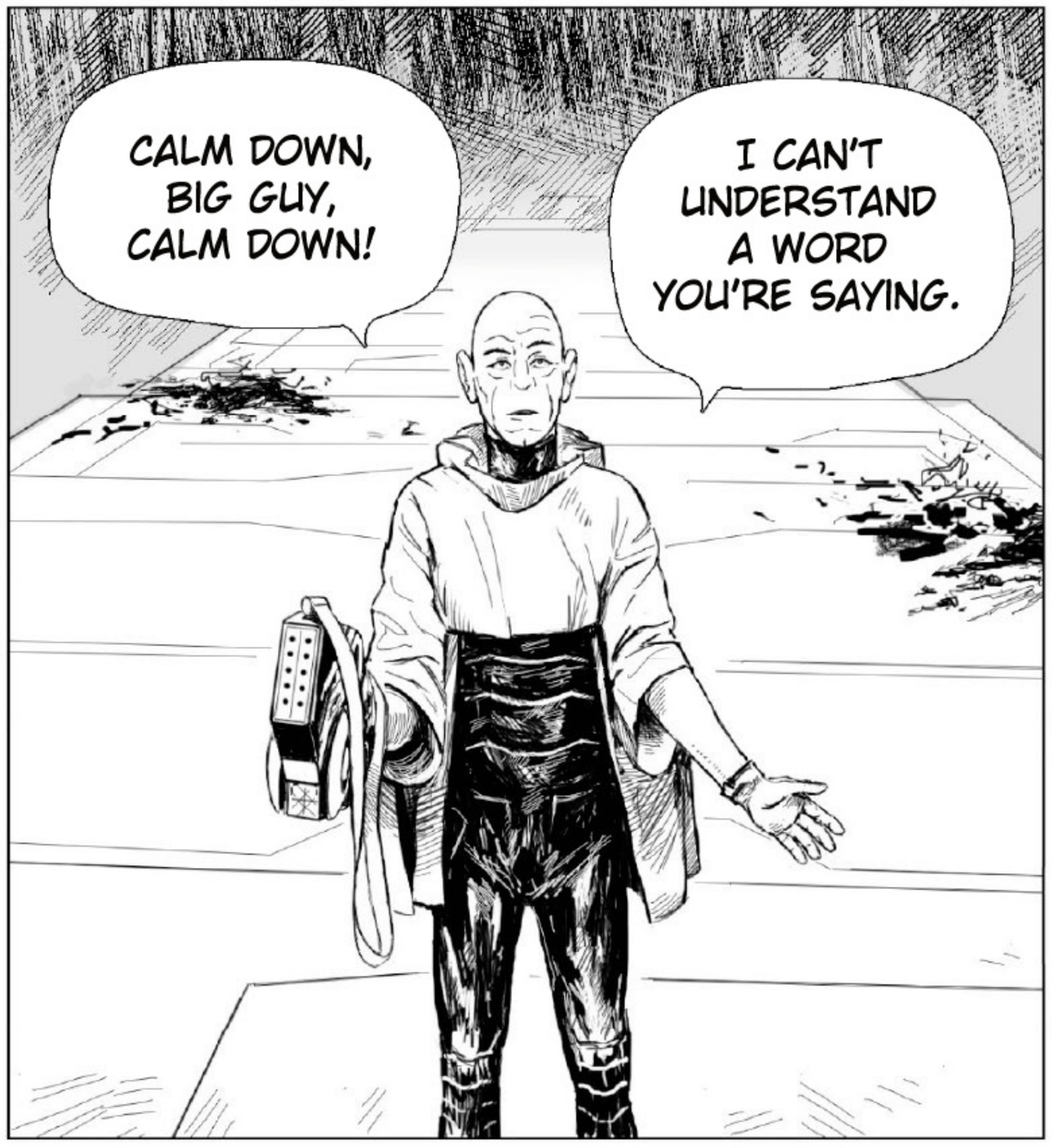
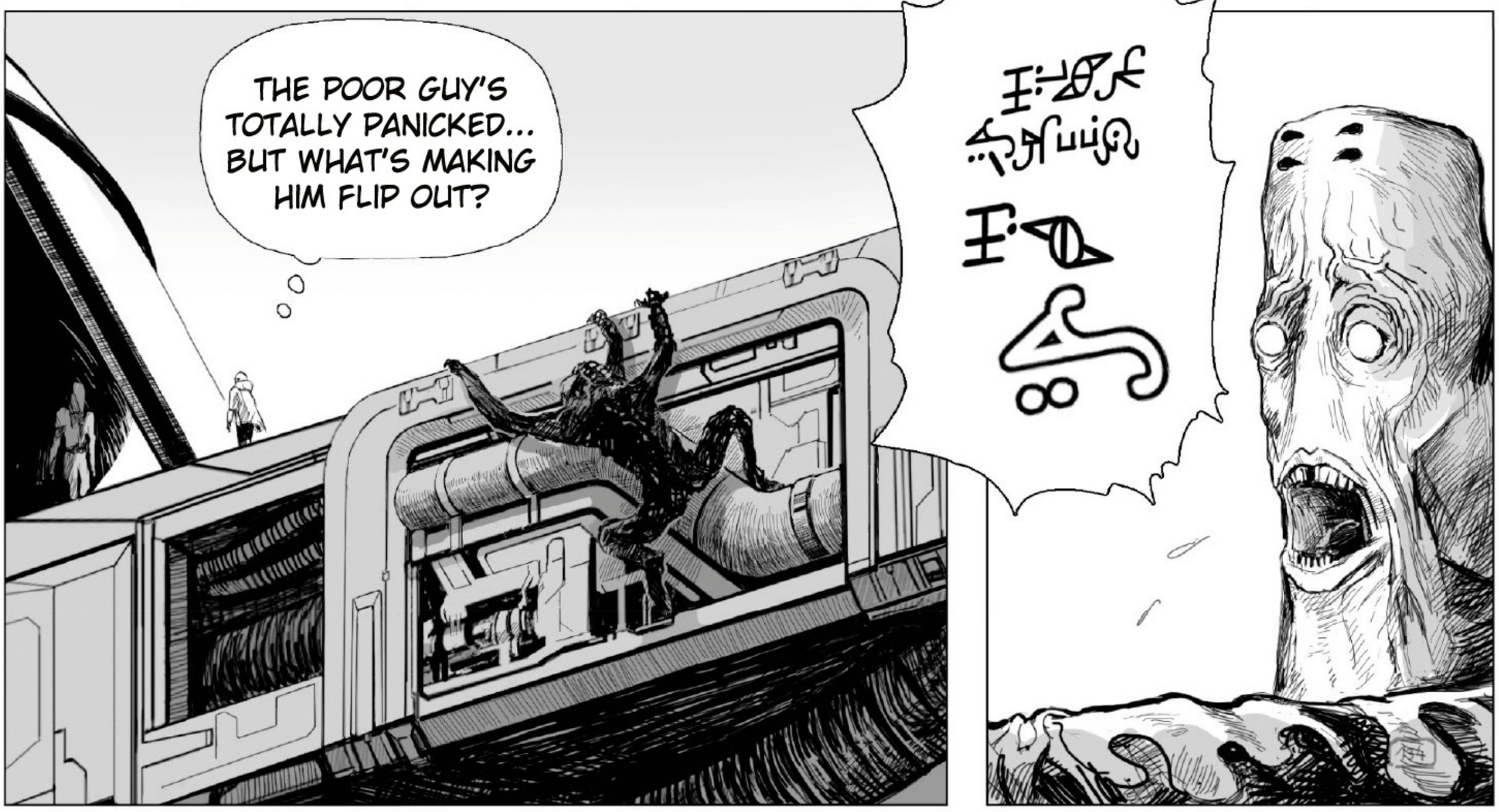

CALM DOWN, BIG GUY, CALM DOWN!
I CAN'T UNDERSTAND A WORD YOU'RE SAYING.

ARE YOU THE ONE I SHOULD BE CONGRATULATING FOR THAT KILL BACK THERE?


THE POOR GUY'S TOTALLY PANICKED... BUT WHAT'S MAKING HIM FLIP OUT?

MOOOOOOOOO

!

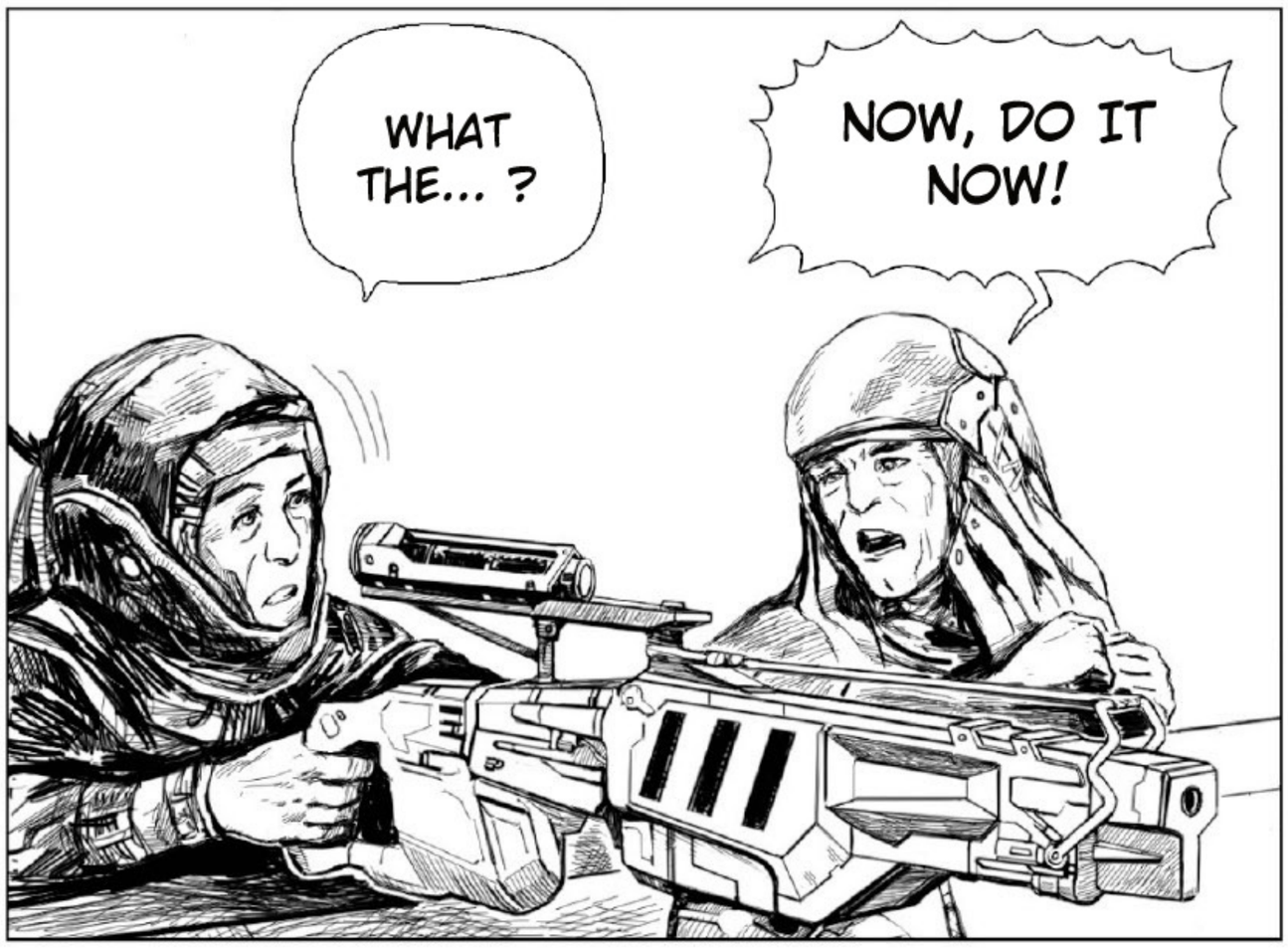
SHRRRRR

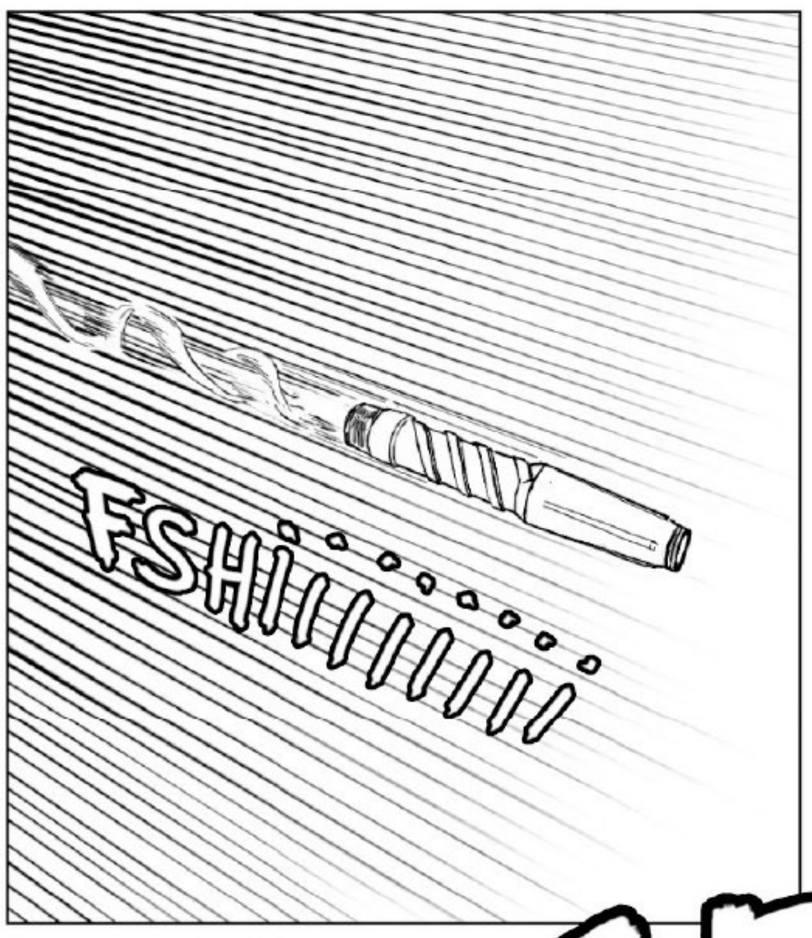
clic

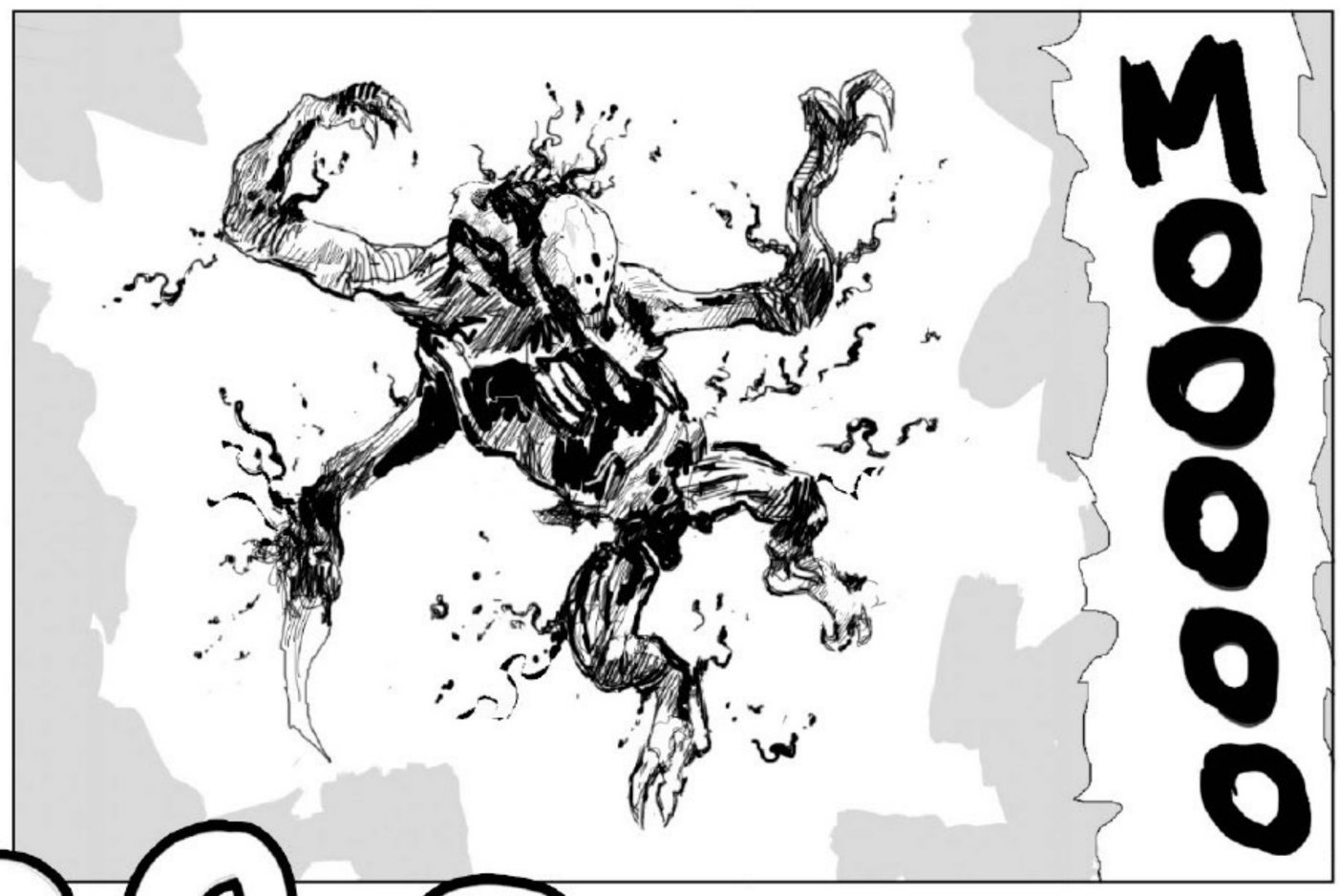
MOOOOOOO

Fwiiiiii

SHWOOOOOM






MOOO

SPLAT

!?

HUMANS?

I THINK I'M STARTING TO UNDERSTAND... IT WASN'T THE BIG GUY WHO TOOK DOWN THE SHADOWS...

TAP

!

?

EEEERM... VERY KIND OF YOU, BUT WHA...

MA-ZOG !

WAIT, I DON'T UNDERSTAND...

SO THIS THING'S A MA-ZOG? AND WHAT'S IT FOR?

TAP

?

MA-ZOG.

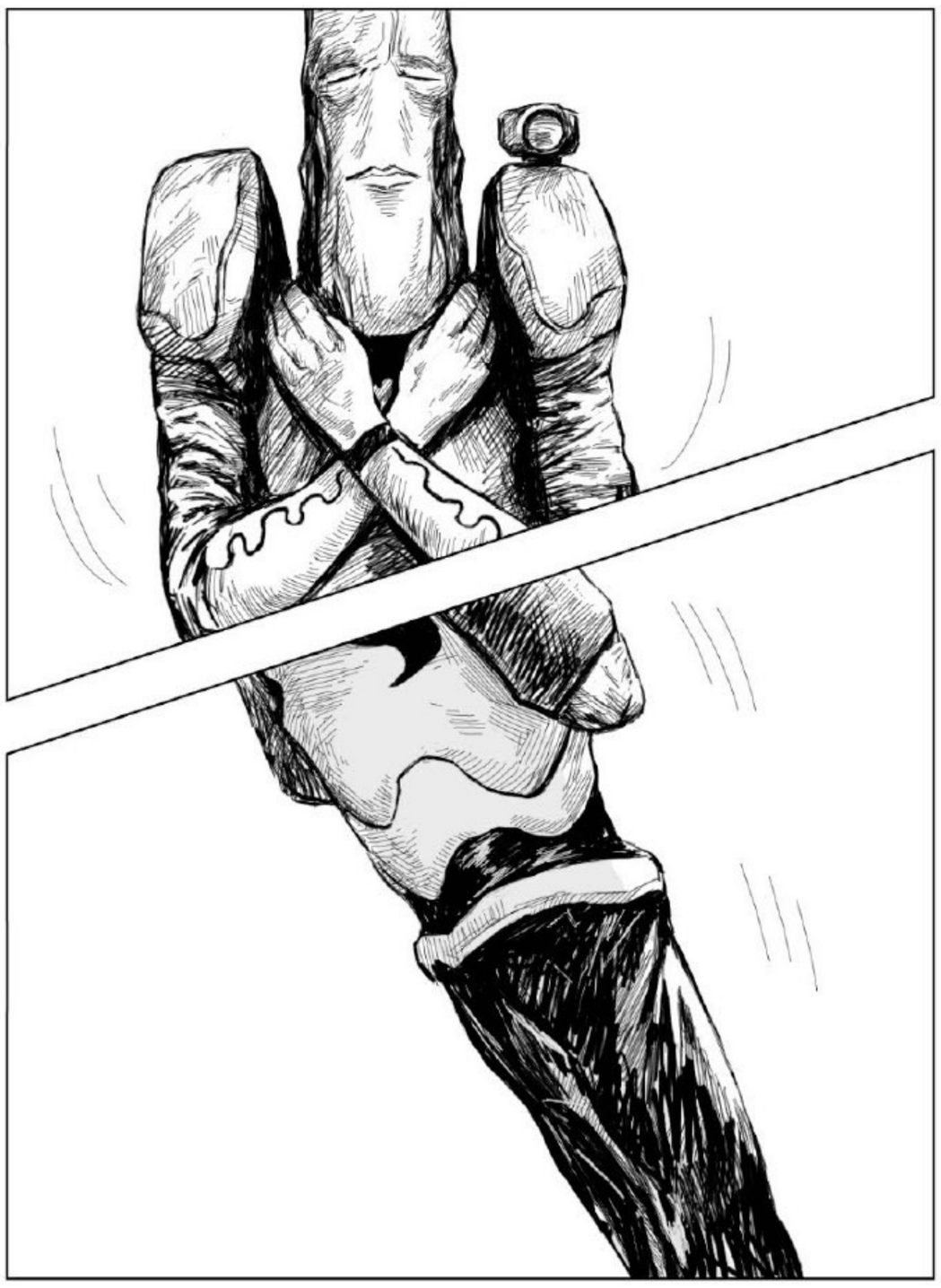
EEERM...

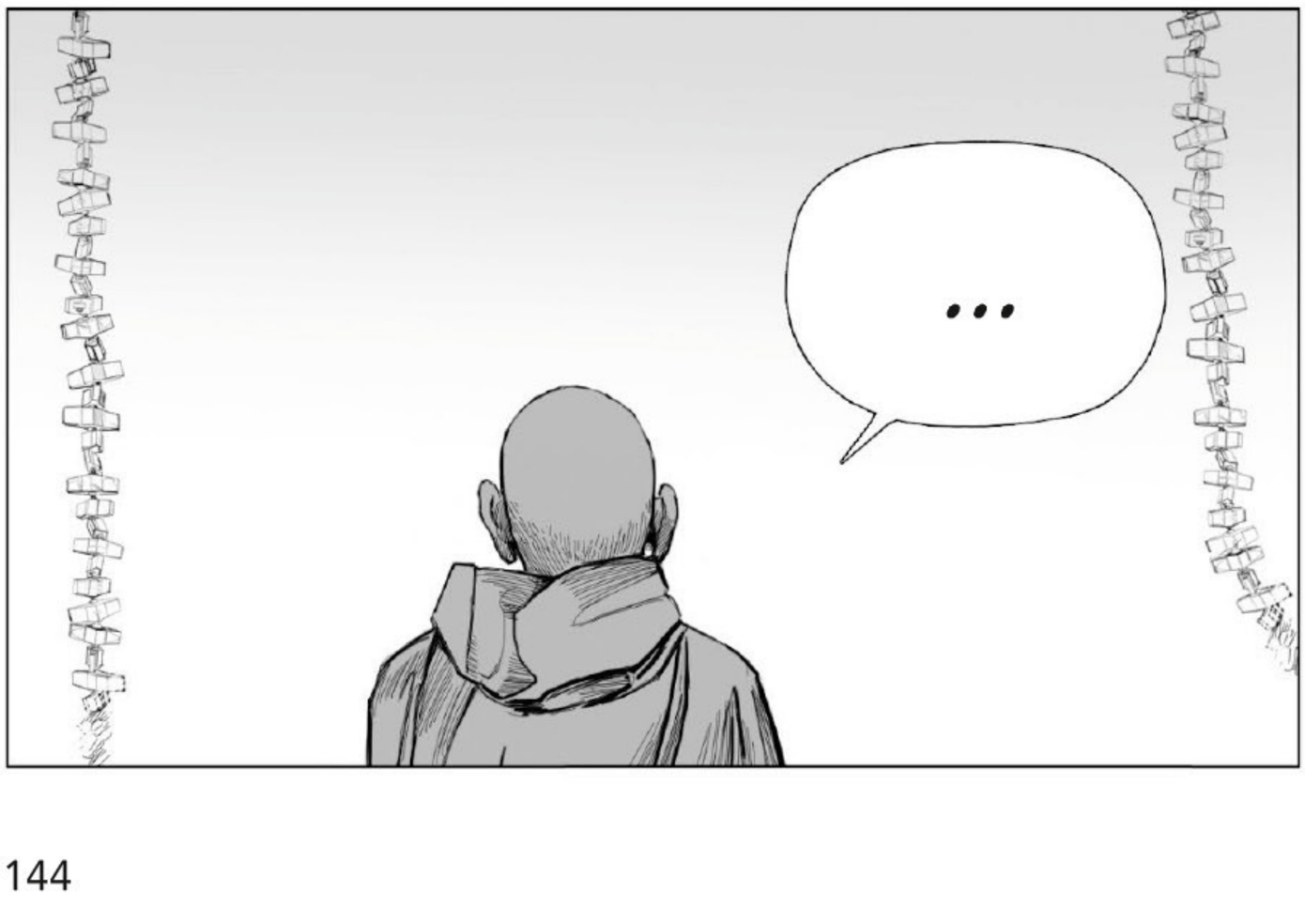
YOU SHOULDN'T GET SO CLOSE TO THE EDGE... YOU MIGHT...

FRRT

I'M SORRY...

...

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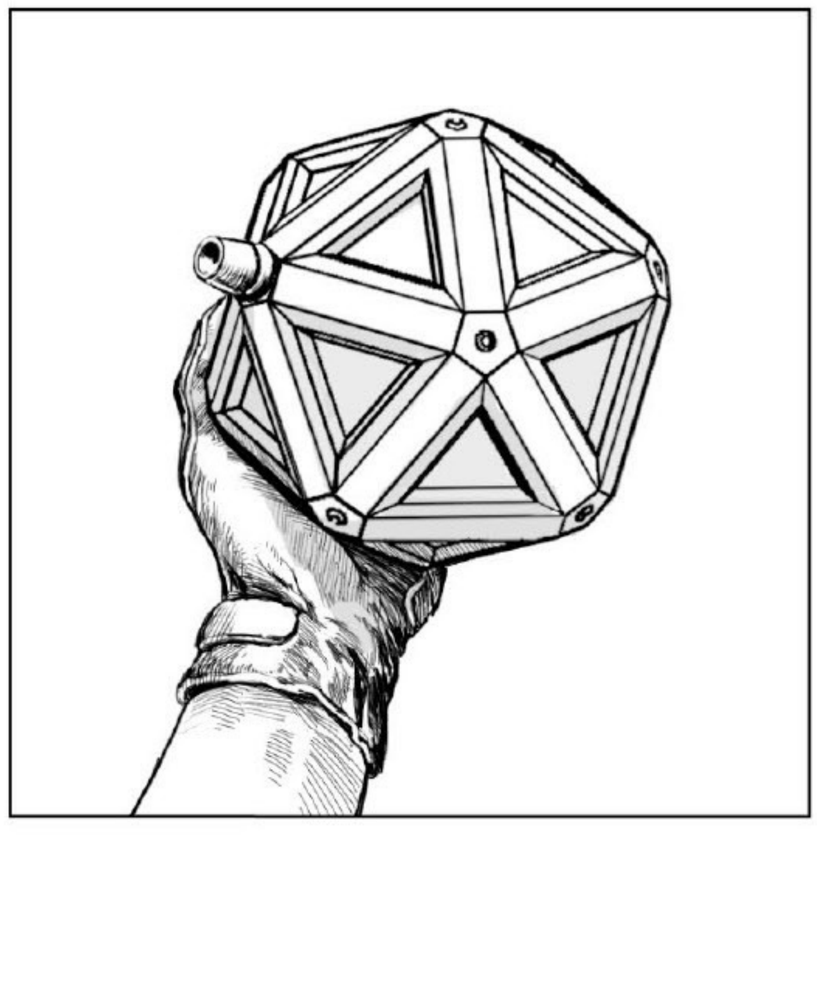
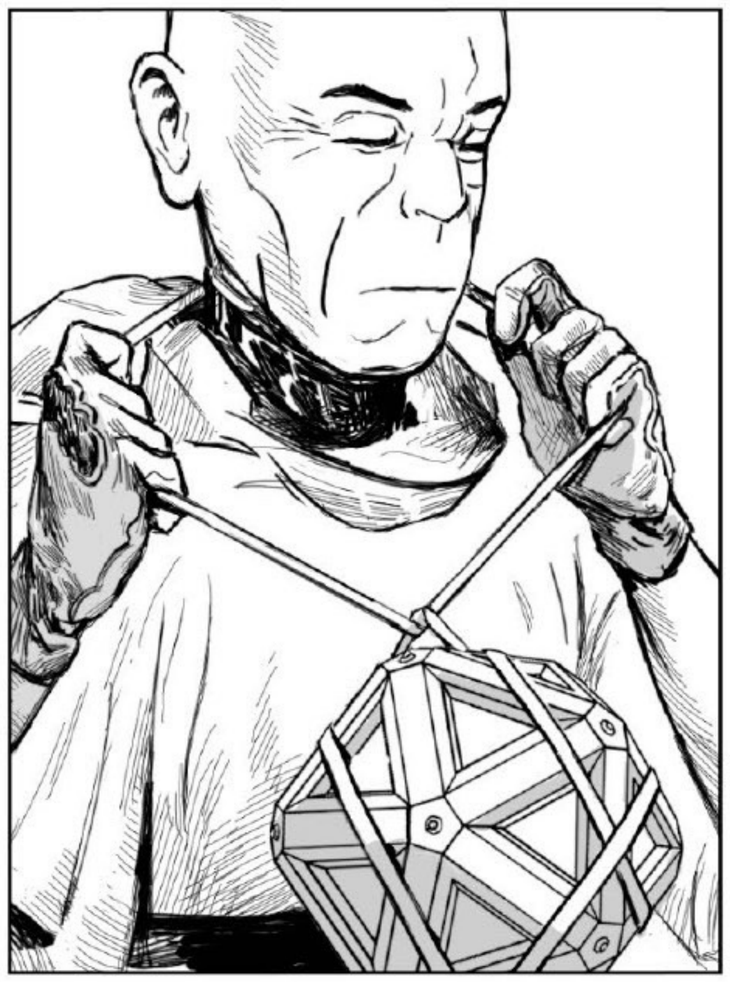
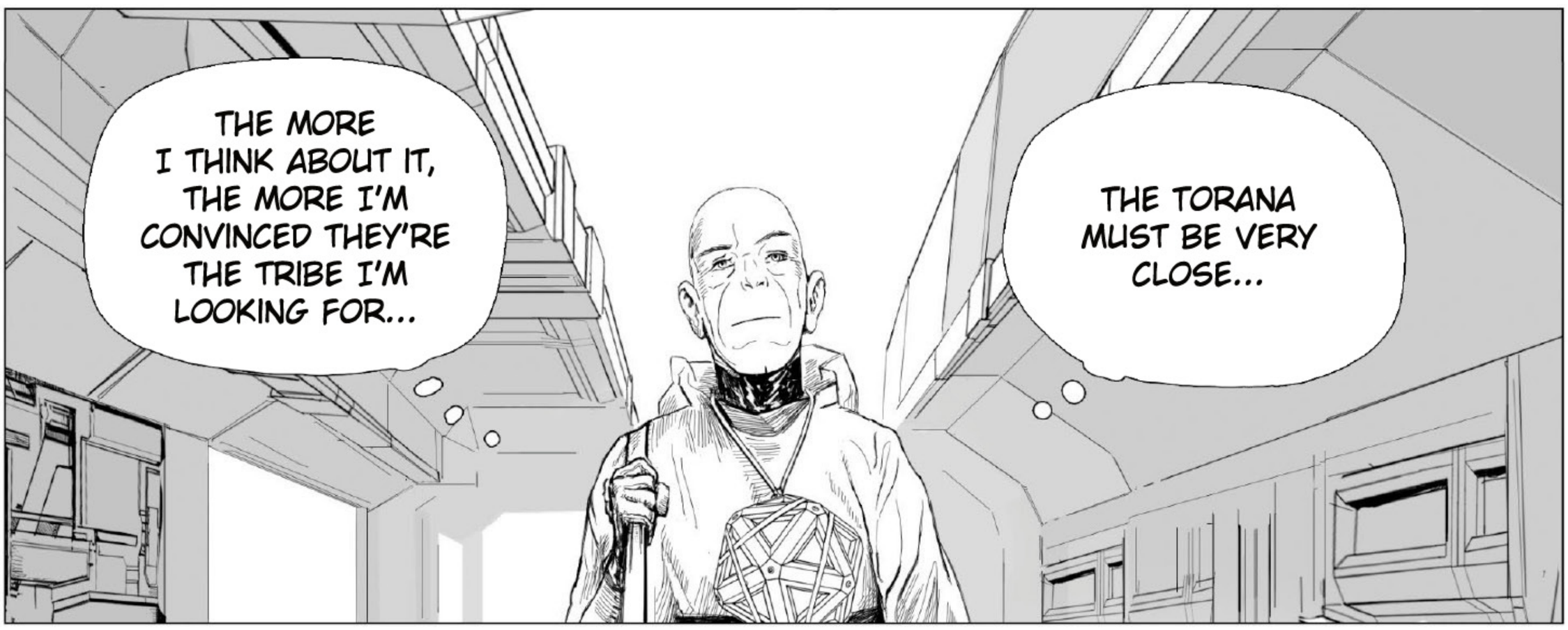
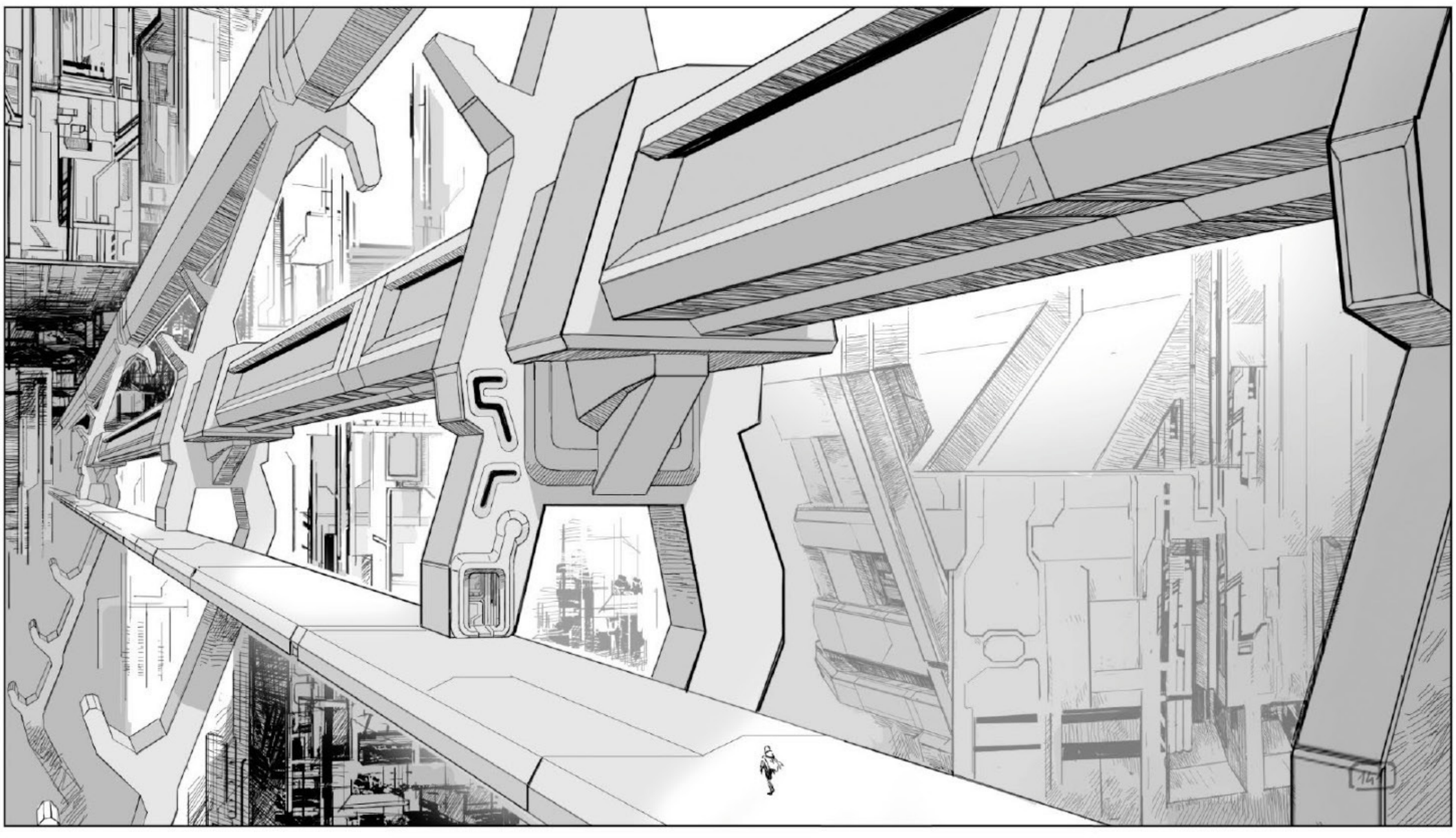




ALRIGHT, NOW TO FIND THOSE HUMANS...
THEY WENT THIS WAY...


THE MORE I THINK ABOUT IT, THE MORE I'M CONVINCED THEY'RE THE TRIBE I'M LOOKING FOR...
THE TORANA MUST BE VERY CLOSE...



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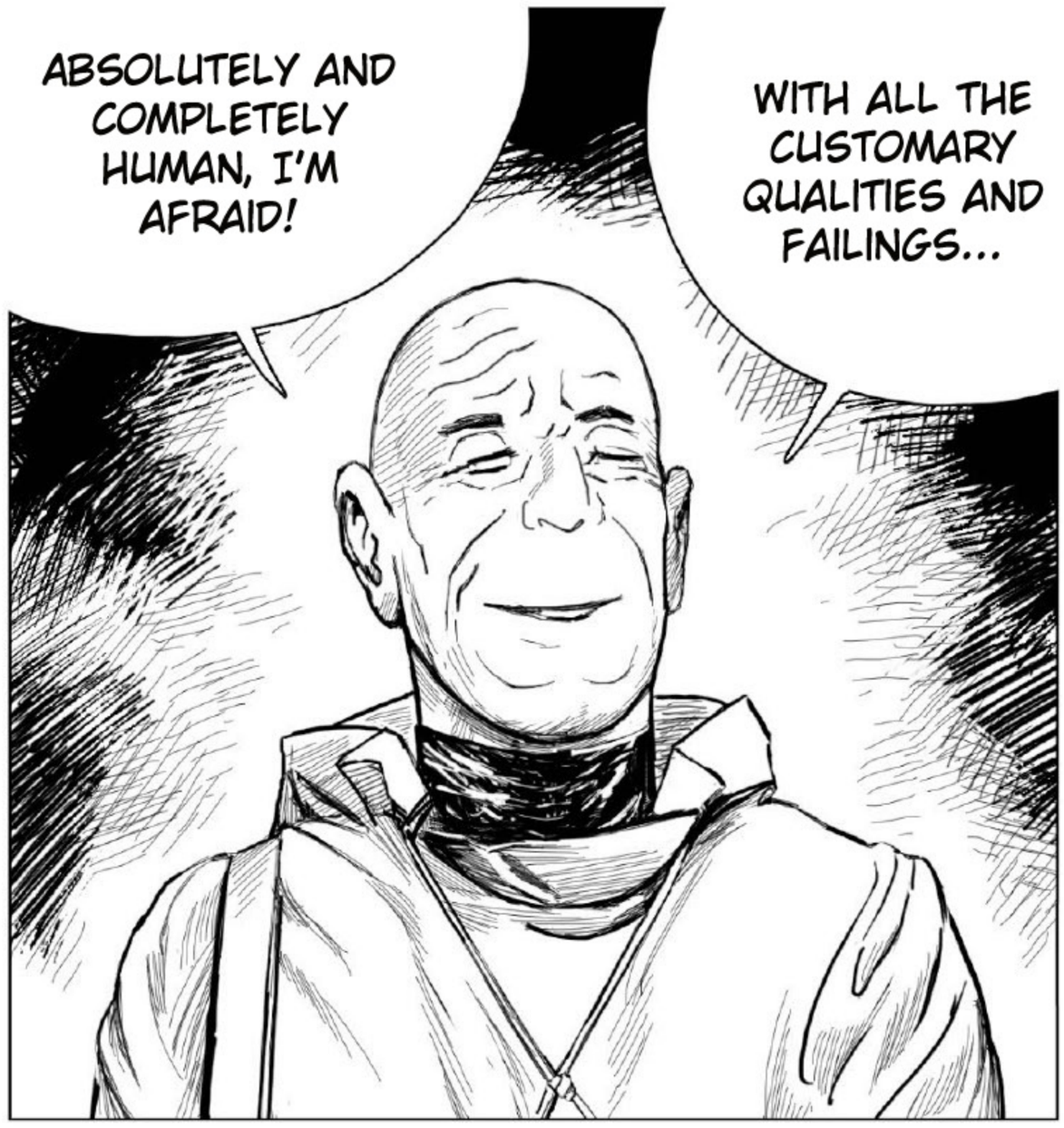
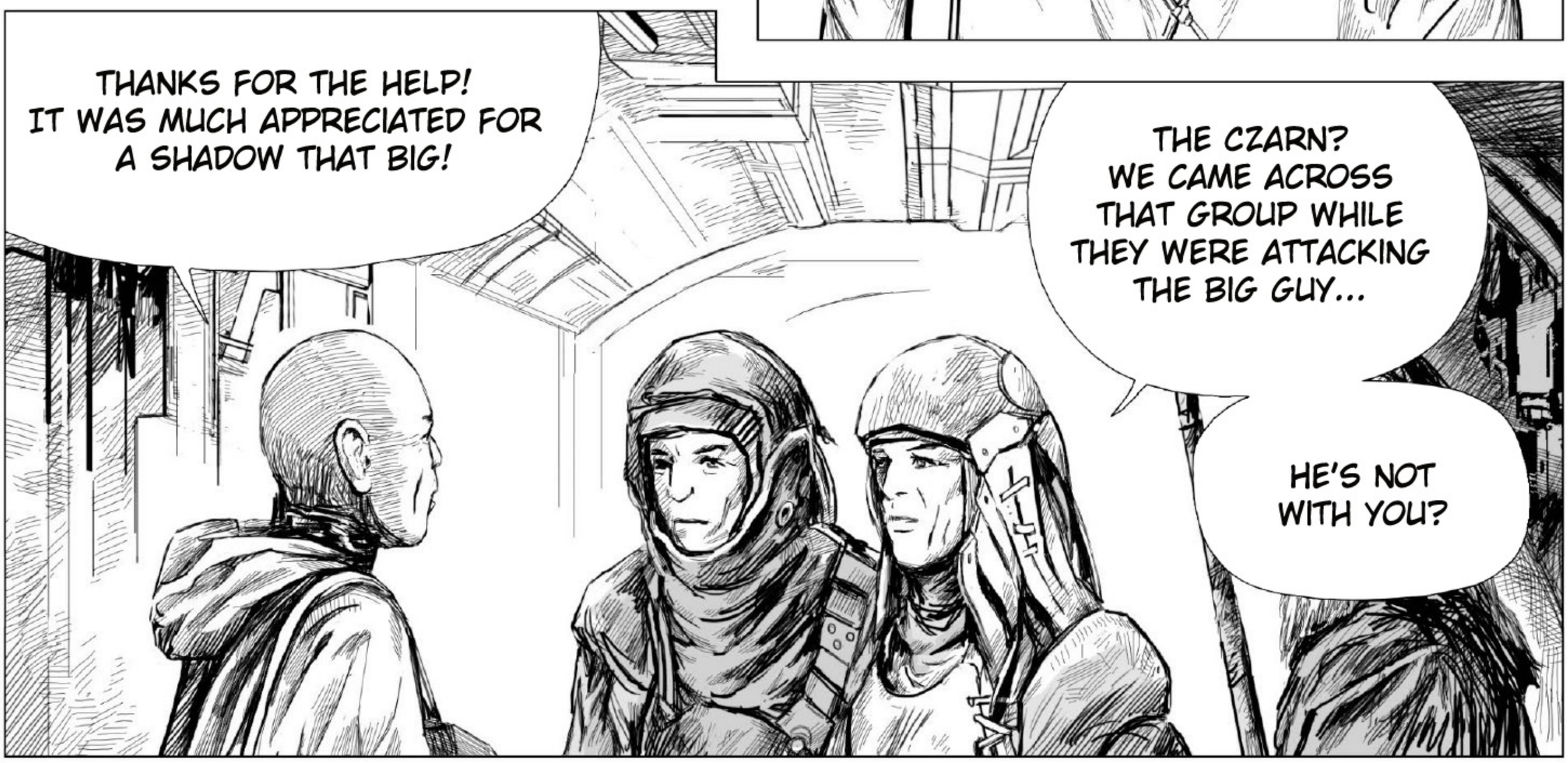
ALRIGHT, LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE EXPECTING ME... THAT'S A GOOD SIGN!

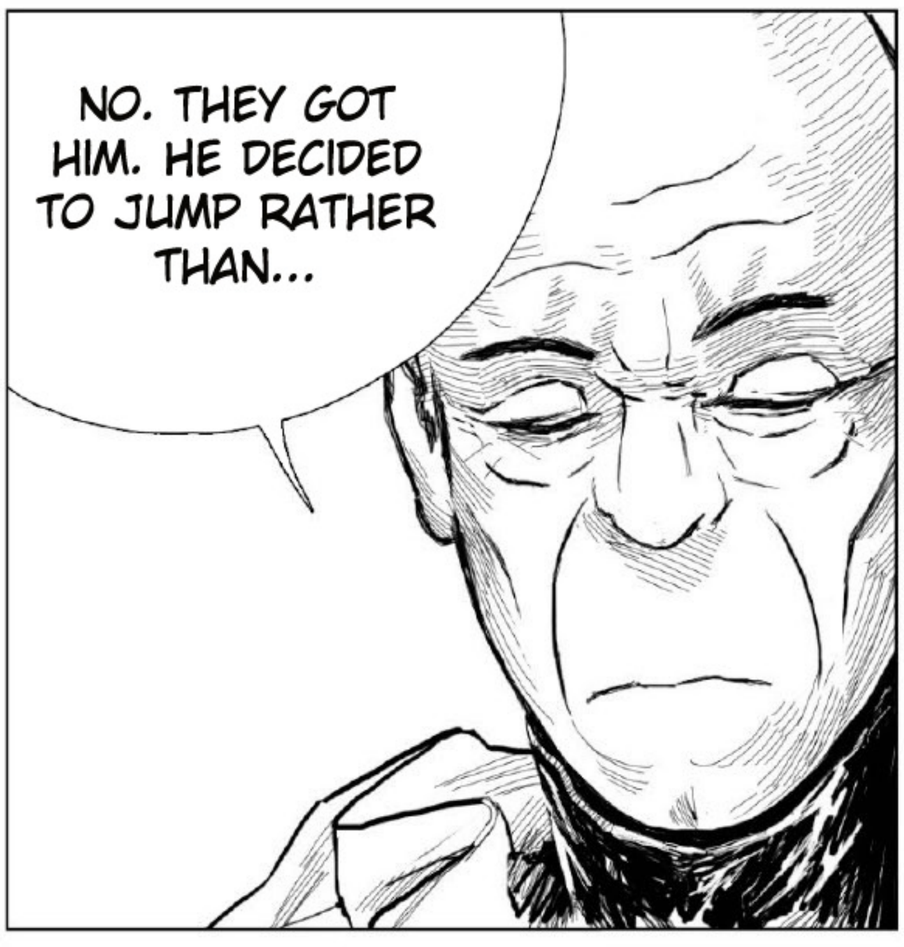
THERE HE IS.

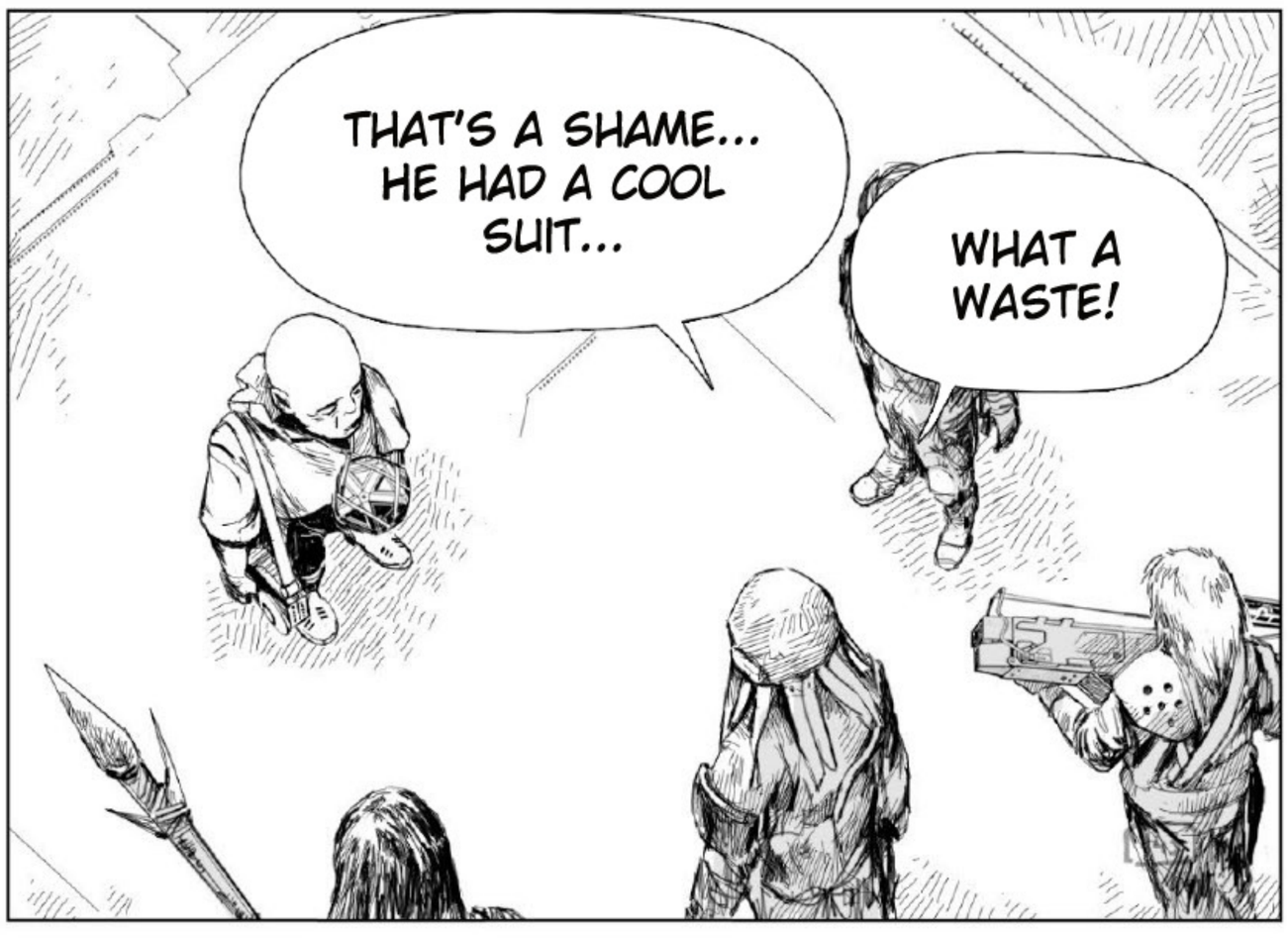
BEFORE YOU COME ANY CLOSER...

HUMAN?


ABSOLUTELY AND COMPLETELY HUMAN, I'M AFRAID!
WITH ALL THE CUSTOMARY QUALITIES AND FAILINGS...


THANKS FOR THE HELP! IT WAS MUCH APPRECIATED FOR A SHADOW THAT BIG!
THE CZARN? WE CAME ACROSS THAT GROUP WHILE THEY WERE ATTACKING THE BIG GUY...
HE'S NOT WITH YOU?


NO. THEY GOT HIM. HE DECIDED TO JUMP RATHER THAN...


THAT'S A SHAME... HE HAD A COOL SUIT...
WHAT A WASTE!

THAT GUN'S PRETTY EFFECTIVE! A MODIFIED CONSTRUCTION TOOL, I GUESS? SOME KIND OF NAILGUN, RIGHT?

I DON'T KNOW... ANOTHER CLAN GAVE IT TO US... IN EXCHANGE FOR SOME WATER.

BUT YOURS ISN'T BAD EITHER...

TAP TAP

THIS? IT'S NOT A WEAPON... BUT IT DOES COME IN HANDY IN A JAM!

?

RIGHT, WE'LL WAIT HERE FOR THE REST OF THE GROUP AND THEN TAKE YOU TO OUR CAMP.

RAMM, OUR LEADER, WILL WANT TO TALK TO YOU...

SOUND GOOD?

HMMMM... I DON'T THINK I'VE GOT ANYTHING ELSE PLANNED FOR TODAY...

WE'LL NEED TO ROPE OURSELVES TOGETHER FROM HERE ON.

THE GROUND IS VERY SLIPPERY...

FSHHHHAAAHHHH

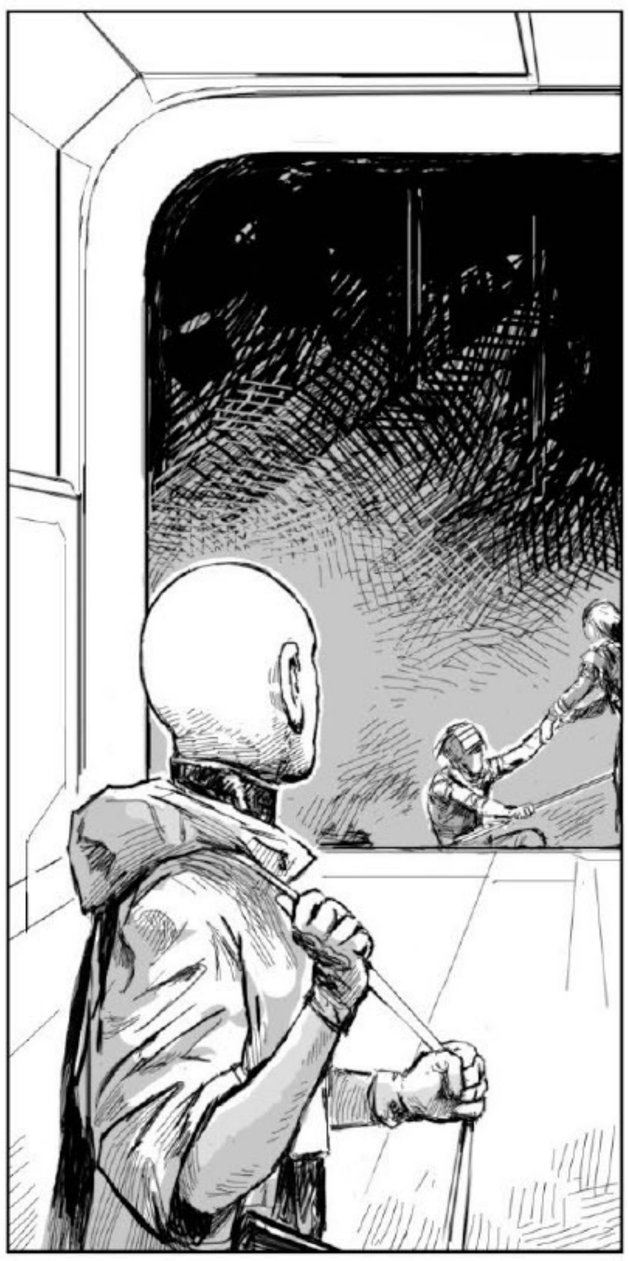
... AND I'LL LEAVE YOU TO IMAGINE HOW LONG A FALL FROM HERE WOULD BE...

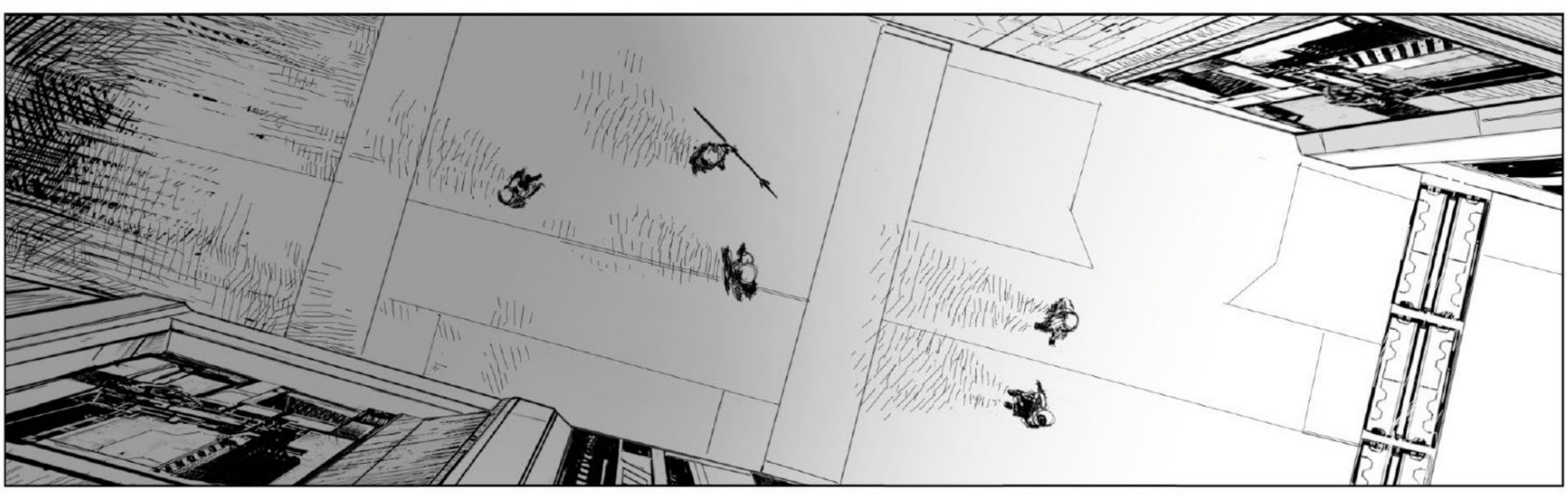
YES. IT'S OUR BEST ENCAMPMENT. THE WATER IS DRINKABLE AND THAT'S THE CURRENCY OF CHOICE AROUND HERE...

IS THAT WATER FLOWING DOWN FROM THERE?

IS THAT WHY YOU PICKED THIS PLACE?

AND IT KEEPS MOST OF THE ANIMALS AWAY.





LUPO,
I PRESUME?

WELCOME TO OUR CAMP!
I AM RAMM, THE LEADER
OF THIS TRIBE.

IF WHAT THE BOYS SAY IS TRUE, YOU'RE A VERY INTERESTING GUY...

... WANDERING AROUND IN THE BREACH ALL ALONE FOR THE PAST FORTY YEARS.

NO IDEA WHAT THAT MEANS, BUT...

COULD YOU START FROM THE BEGINNING? FOR ME?

WITH PLEASURE! AND I HOPE IN EXCHANGE YOU'LL BE ABLE TO ANSWER SOME OF MY QUESTIONS?

!?

...

I'D BE LYING IF I SAID I UNDERSTOOD EVERYTHING... YOU TALK ABOUT THINGS... I KNOW NOTHING ABOUT.

AND YET YOU DUMBED IT DOWN, DIDN'T YOU?

THAT'S RIGHT.

BUT IF I UNDERSTOOD RIGHT, YOU'RE TRYING TO GET THROUGH A... TORANA? A HUGE BLACK DOOR THAT CHANGES LOCATIONS, RIGHT?

YES...

IF I DO THAT, I CAN GET BACK TO PORO AND JENNA.

THERE IS A BLACK PORTAL NOT FAR FROM HERE.

BUT AS FAR AS I KNOW, IT'S NEVER MOVED AN INCH...

NO-ONE'S EVER GONE THROUGH IT?

JUST DRONES. BUT TO BE HONEST, WE DON'T WATCH IT. WE STAY AWAY FROM THAT PLACE.

WHY?

...

THAT PLACE IS TABOO. THERE WAS A HUGE BATTLE, THE CZARNS AGAINST...

... A STRANGE BEING THAT CAME THROUGH THE BLACK GATE.

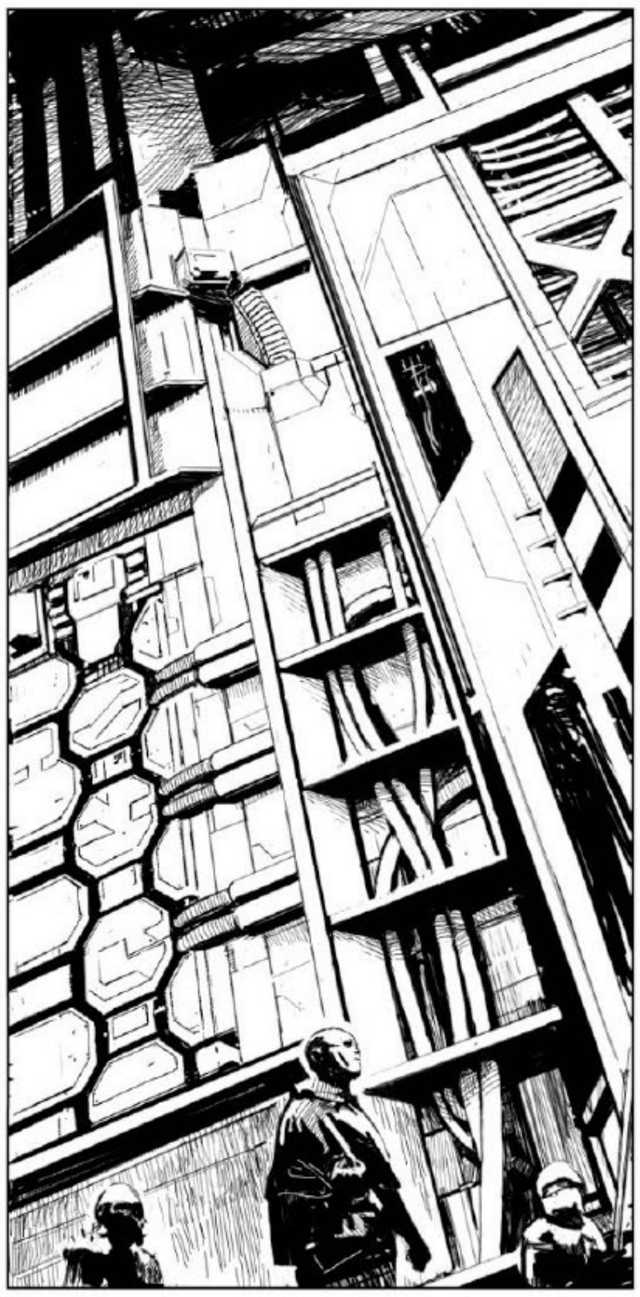
COULD IT BE...

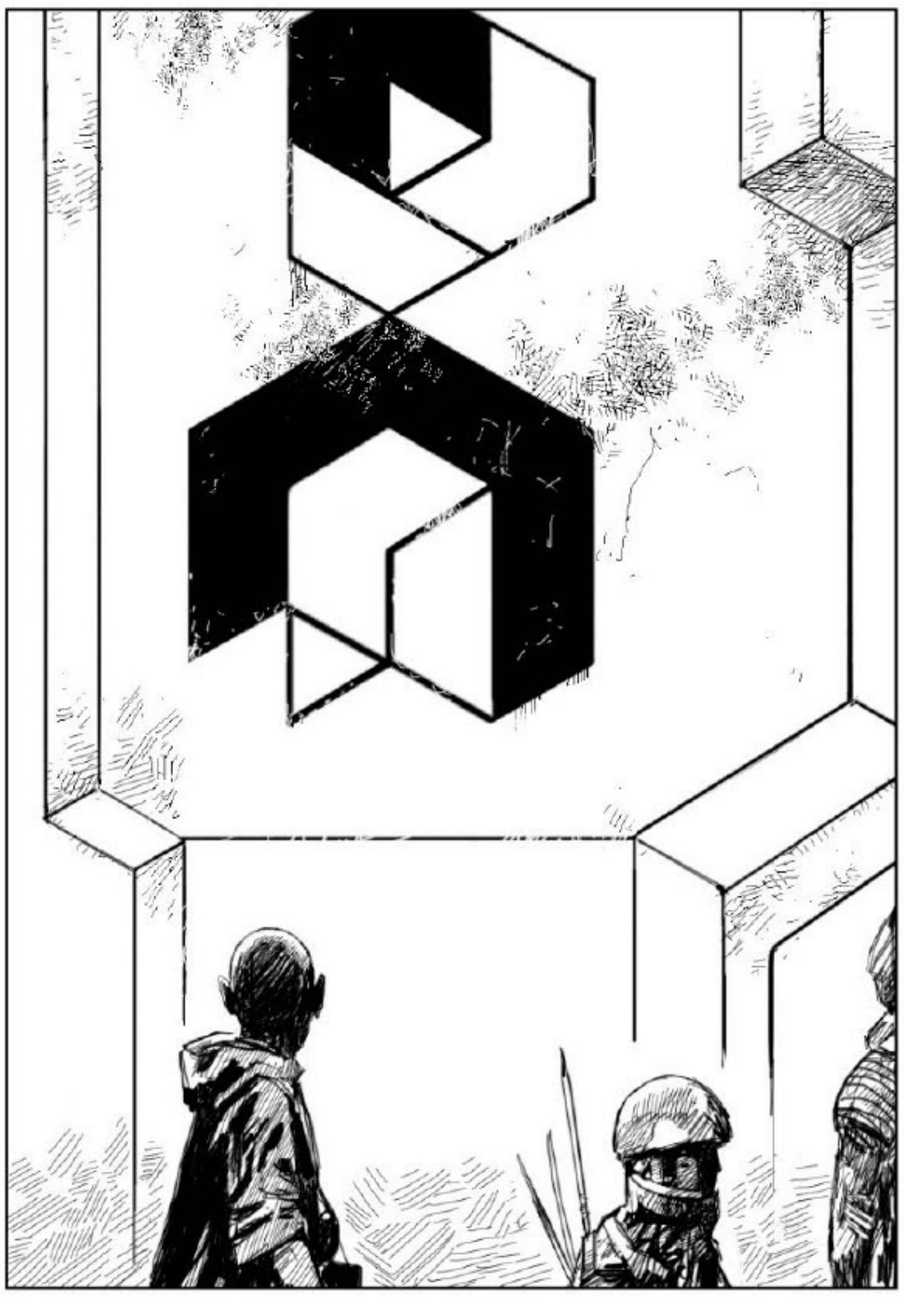
A NOMAD, LIKE THE ONES I TOLD YOU ABOUT?

TAKE ME THERE AND WE CAN FIND OUT.

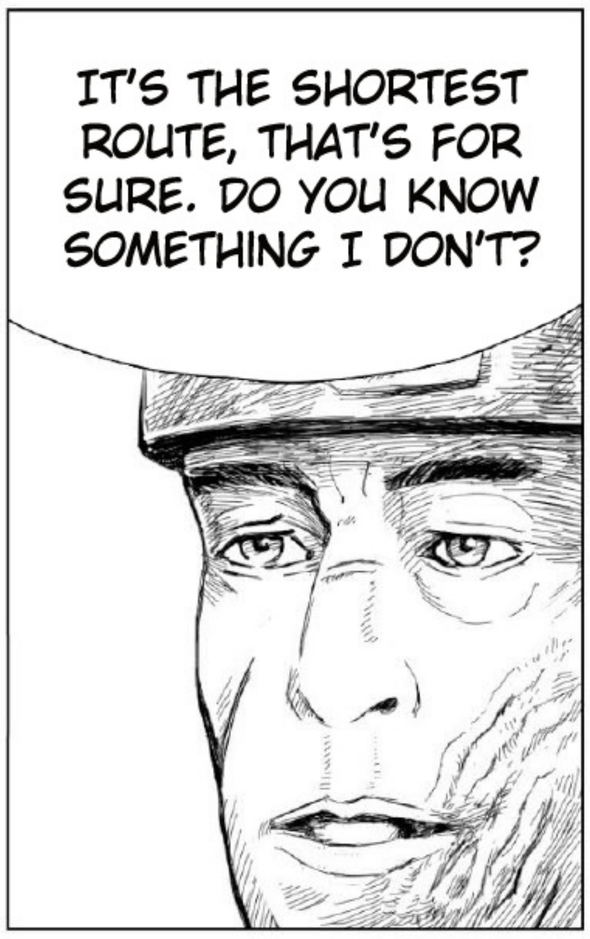
AGREED. THAT GIVES US TWO GOOD REASONS TO GO AND CHECK OUT THAT SECTOR.

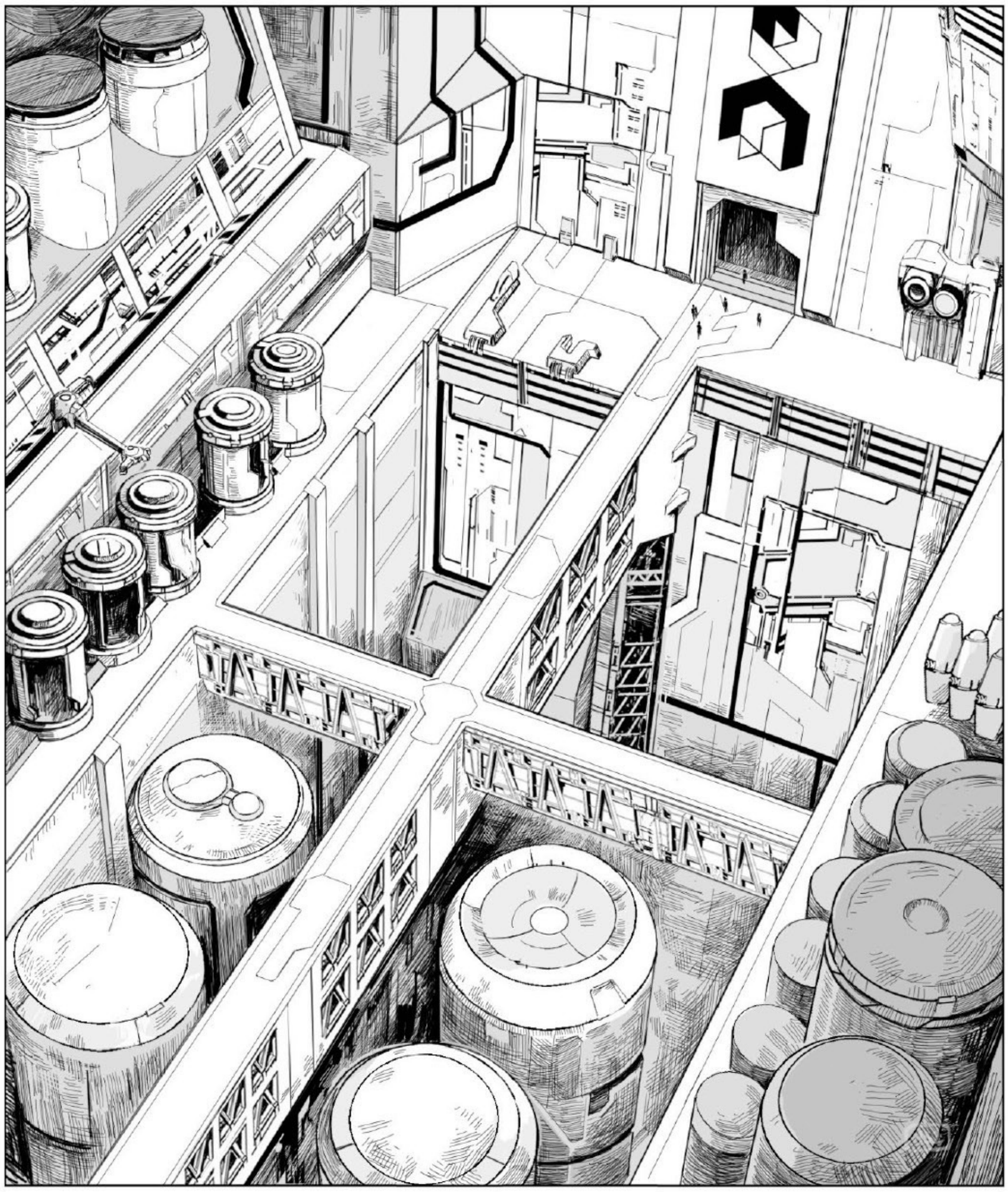
COME ON, LET'S GET MOVING!

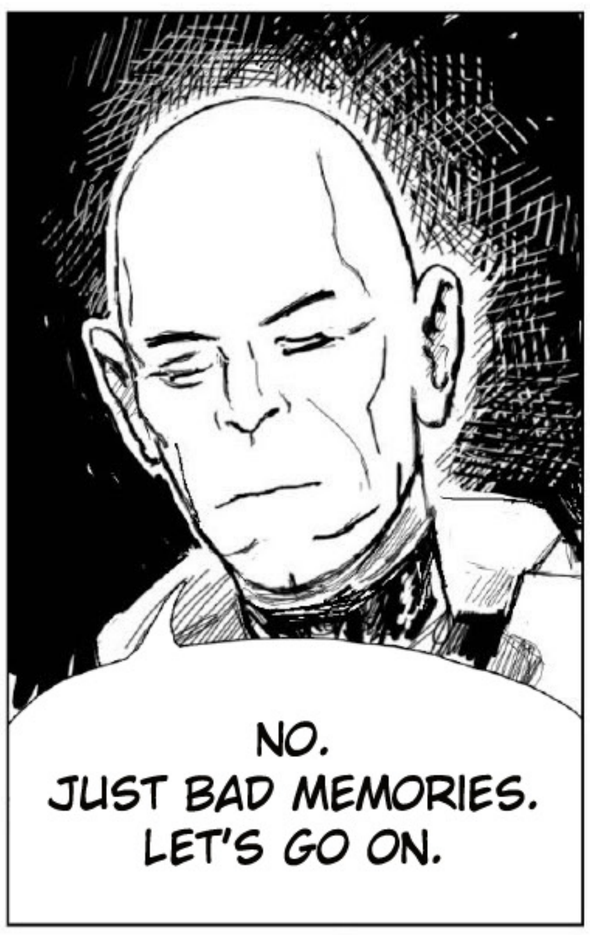




ARE YOU SURE THERE'S NO OTHER WAY, RAMM?


IT'S THE SHORTEST ROUTE, THAT'S FOR SURE. DO YOU KNOW SOMETHING I DON'T?




NO.
JUST BAD MEMORIES.
LET'S GO ON.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT THIS PLACE IS, LUPO?

YES.

TO KEEP IT SIMPLE, ALL THE CREATURES YOU HUNT, THE BIG AND THE SMALL...

... PROBABLY COME FROM HERE.

HERE? FROM THESE... EGGS?

YES, EGGS, IF YOU LIKE.

THAT THING YOU'RE CARRYING, IS THAT AN EGG TOO? IS THERE A CREATURE INSIDE?

HAHAHA! NO, IT'S NOT AN EGG!

WHAT DID HE CALL IT AGAIN?

A MA... MA-ZOG?

MA-ZOG IS NOT AN OBJECT!

!?

MA-ZOG IS OUR LEADER.

BUT WE CALL HIM BIG-HEAD.

BECAUSE HE MAKES GIZMOS WORK.

ALL GIZMOS.

YOU KNOW THEM?

YES, THEY COME HERE OFTEN... ALWAYS SCAVENGING FOR TECH...

HI SHEB! GET A GOOD HAUL?

HELLO RAMM! YES, GOOD, GOOD! ALMOST EVERYTHING.

AND WHAT WE NEED...

PERHAPS THE OLD MAN WILL GIVE TO US?

THAT'S THE OBJECT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR, SHEB? ARE YOU SURE?

YES, SURE-SURE! IT'S JUST LIKE ON BIG-HEAD'S PAPER!

WILL YOU GIVE TO SHEB, OLD MAN?

...

YOU SAID YOUR LEADER... MA-ZOG... KNOWS HOW TO MAKE GIZMOS WORK?

YES, HE'S VERY SMART!

...

HE WANTS IT LOTS AND LOTS.

AND THIS OBJECT, HOW BADLY DOES HE WANT IT?

THEN HERE'S WHAT I SUGGEST...

... IF HE AGREES TO MEET ME, TELL YOUR LEADER I'LL GIVE IT TO HIM MYSELF.

...

'KAY!

STAY ROUND HERE, OLD MAN, I WILL TELL YOU HIS ANSWER QUICK.

ALRIGHT, WE GO. COMING, DEEKA?

DEEKA?

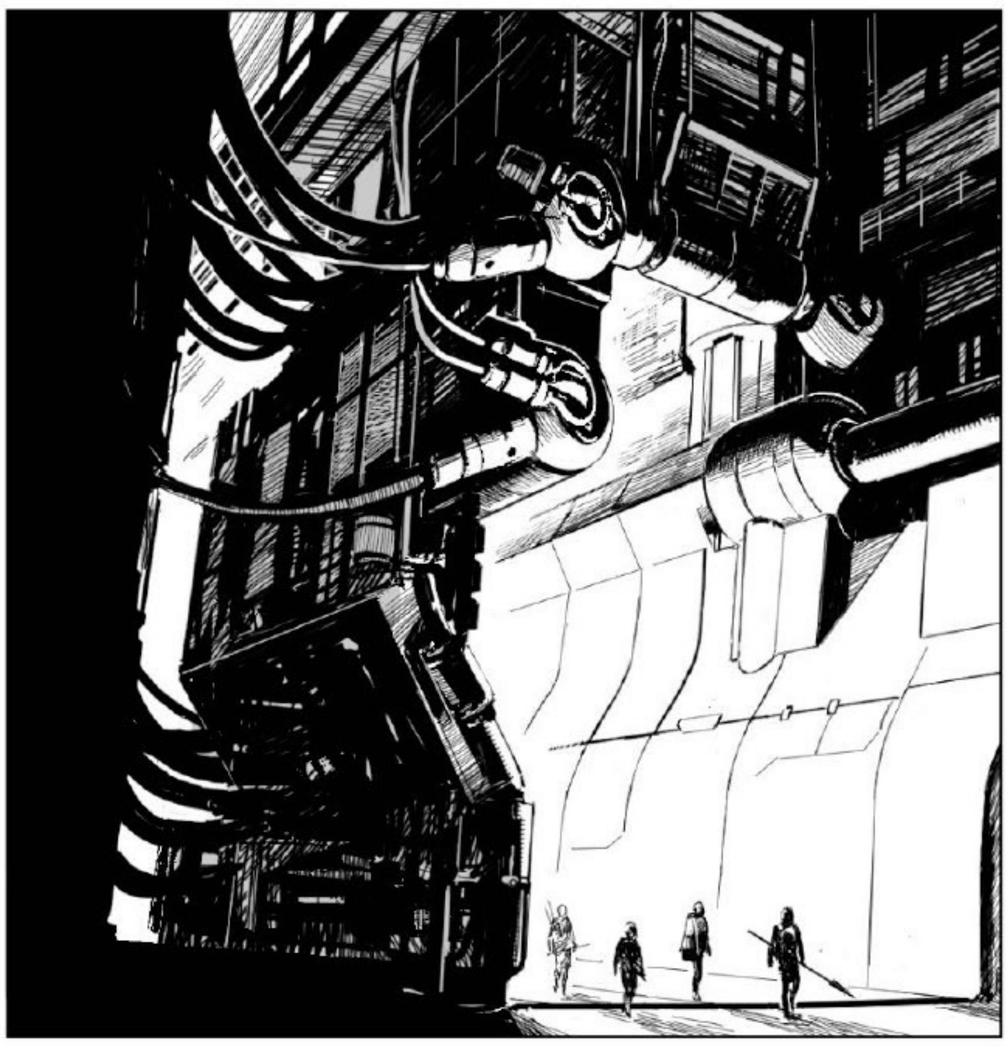
THERE A PROBLEM, LIL SIS?

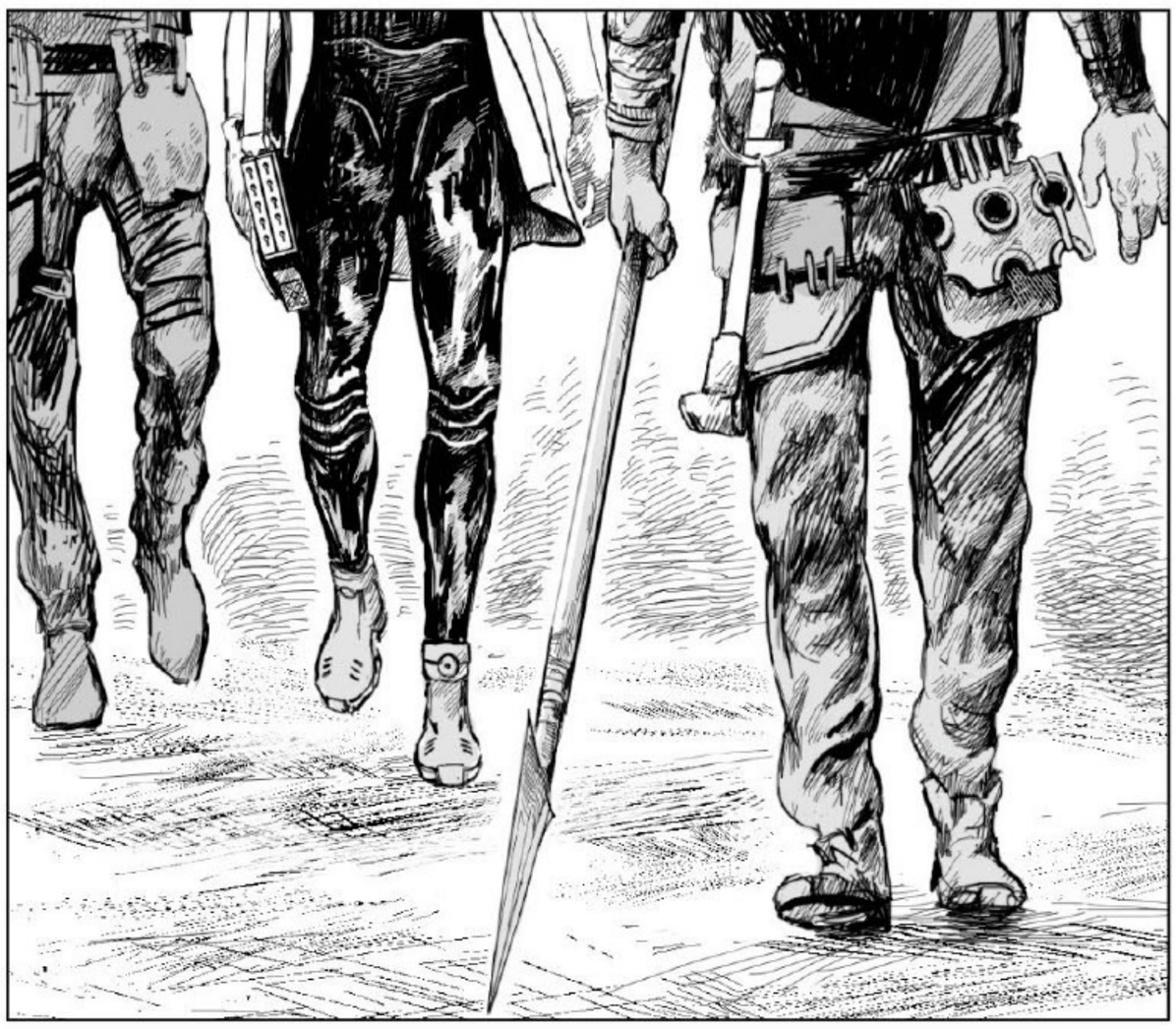
ERM... NO. I'M FINE.

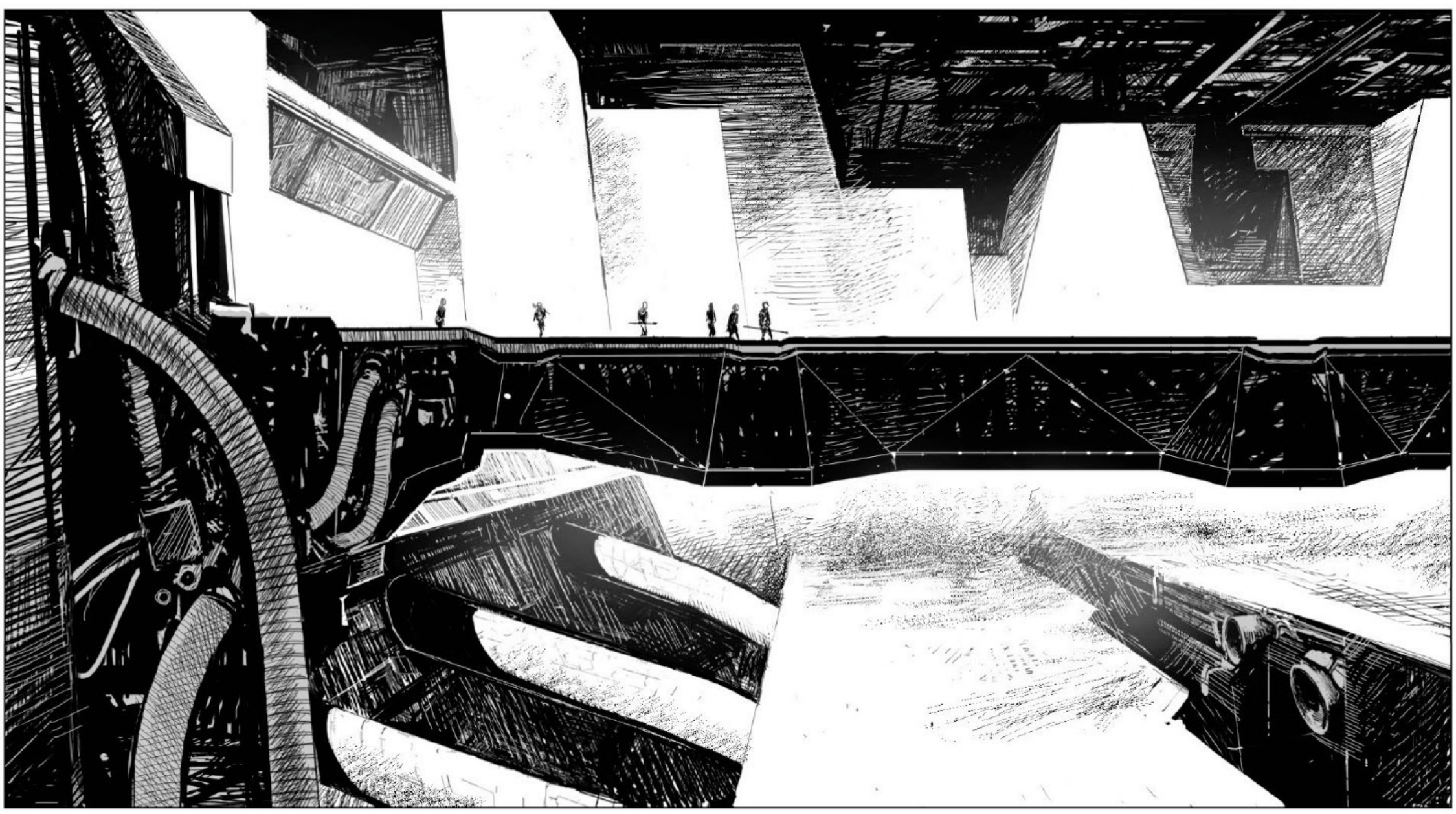
LET'S GO.

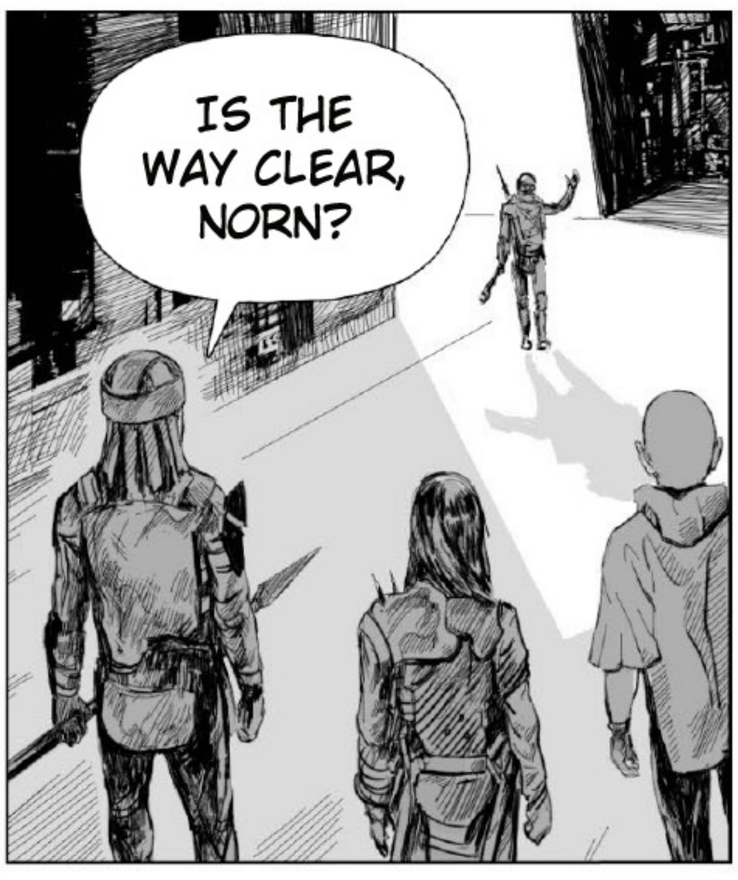
COME ON, WE HAVE TO GO TOO, THERE'S STILL A WAY TO GO.

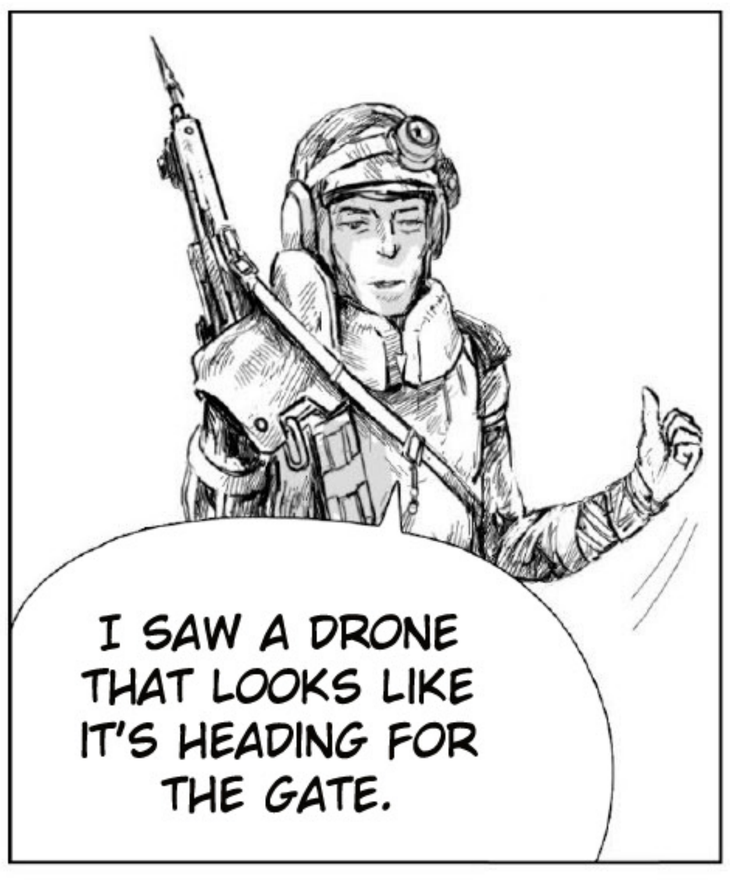
OF COURSE. LEAD ON.








IS THE WAY CLEAR, NORN?


I SAW A DRONE THAT LOOKS LIKE IT'S HEADING FOR THE GATE.

OK, WE'LL FOLLOW YOU. EVERYONE, NOT A SOUND FROM NOW ON!

COME HERE, LUPO! YOU SHOULD SEE THIS FOR YOURSELF!

WELL, IS IT A TORANA?

DEFINITELY!

AND IT'S A BIG ONE TOO...

SHHHH! THERE'S THE DRONE.

TiP
TiP
TiP

TiP
TiP
TiP

THERE! LOOK! A CZARN! IT WAS HIDDEN!

TiP
TiP

TiP

IT GOT THROUGH! IT GOT THROUGH!

LUPO! WAIT!

SHKRRRRRR

GOD DAMN, YOU'RE FAST!

SO, DID IT MAKE IT?

NO. IT GOT CUT IN TWO.

IT'S A CLEAN CUT.

AND THE MUD'S ALREADY INERT...

HOWEVER... THAT CZARN WAS PARTICULARLY CRAFTY TO BE WAITING IN AMBUSH LIKE THAT...

IT WANTED TO GET THROUGH THE TORANA? BUT WHAT FOR?

I HAVE NO IDEA...

BUT KNOWING THAT THE SHADOWS AND I HAVE A COMMON GOAL...

... DOESN'T FILL ME WITH JOY.

OKAY, LET'S GO, WE'RE DONE HERE.

YES, I'M COMING.

WE'LL TAKE ONE OF THESE PIPES. IT'S A LITTLE TRICKY. WE'LL HAVE TO GO IN PAIRS.

GO IN AS USUAL, BOYS.

I'LL BRING UP THE REAR WITH LUPO.

YOU WANTED TO TALK TO ME ALONE, RAMM?

YOU CATCH ON FAST, LUPO. I LIKE THAT.

IT'S ABOUT THE CZARN... I'D LIKE THAT TO STAY BETWEEN US.

WHY'S THAT?

...

UP UNTIL NOW, WE TOOK THEM FOR BEASTS.

DANGEROUS, BUT MANAGEABLE.

APPARENTLY, THEY'RE FAR MORE THAN THAT.

TELL ME ABOUT IT!...

IF THAT GETS OUT... I FEAR THE TEMPTATION WILL BE EVEN STRONGER.

WHAT TEMPTATION?

TO BECOME LIKE THEM.

...

YOU MEAN THAT HUMANS ARE GETTING THEMSELVES CONTAMINATED ON PURPOSE?

YES. IT'S ALREADY HAPPENED SEVERAL TIMES IN OUR CLAN.

LIFE IS HARD HERE, LUPO...

... ALTHOUGH I DON'T AGREE WITH THE APPROACH...

... I CAN UNDERSTAND THAT IT'S A QUICK WAY TO ESCAPE THE COLD, HUNGER, SICKNESS...

YOU SEE, THOSE THINGS, THE CZARNS, DON'T SEEM TO BE SUFFERING...

YOUR FACE! ARE YOU SURPRISED?

YES. IT HAD NEVER CROSSED MY MIND BEFORE.

EVERY TIME I'VE RUN INTO THE CZARNS...

... THEY'VE TRIED TO KILL ME, NOT CONTAMINATE ME.

CAN I COUNT ON YOU?

OF COURSE!

THANKS.

ALRIGHT, EVERYONE'S HERE. WE'RE NOT FAR...

IT'S UP THAT RAMP.

?

IS THERE A PROBLEM?

MAYBE. IN THE HURRY WE LEFT IN, WE FORGOT TO BRING AN OFFERING WITH US...

AH. IS THAT BAD?

MY MEN ARE BRAVE. BUT THEY DON'T WANT TO OFFEND THE SPIRITS OF THOSE WHO FOUGHT HERE.

HMM...

AND THE LIGHTS WENT OUT. THAT'S UNUSUAL...

THEY'RE SAYING IT'S A BAD OMEN...

ALRIGHT. I SEE...

POC

?

?

!?

PSHHHHH

FSHHH

PSHH

WILL YOU ALLOW ME TO ENTER?

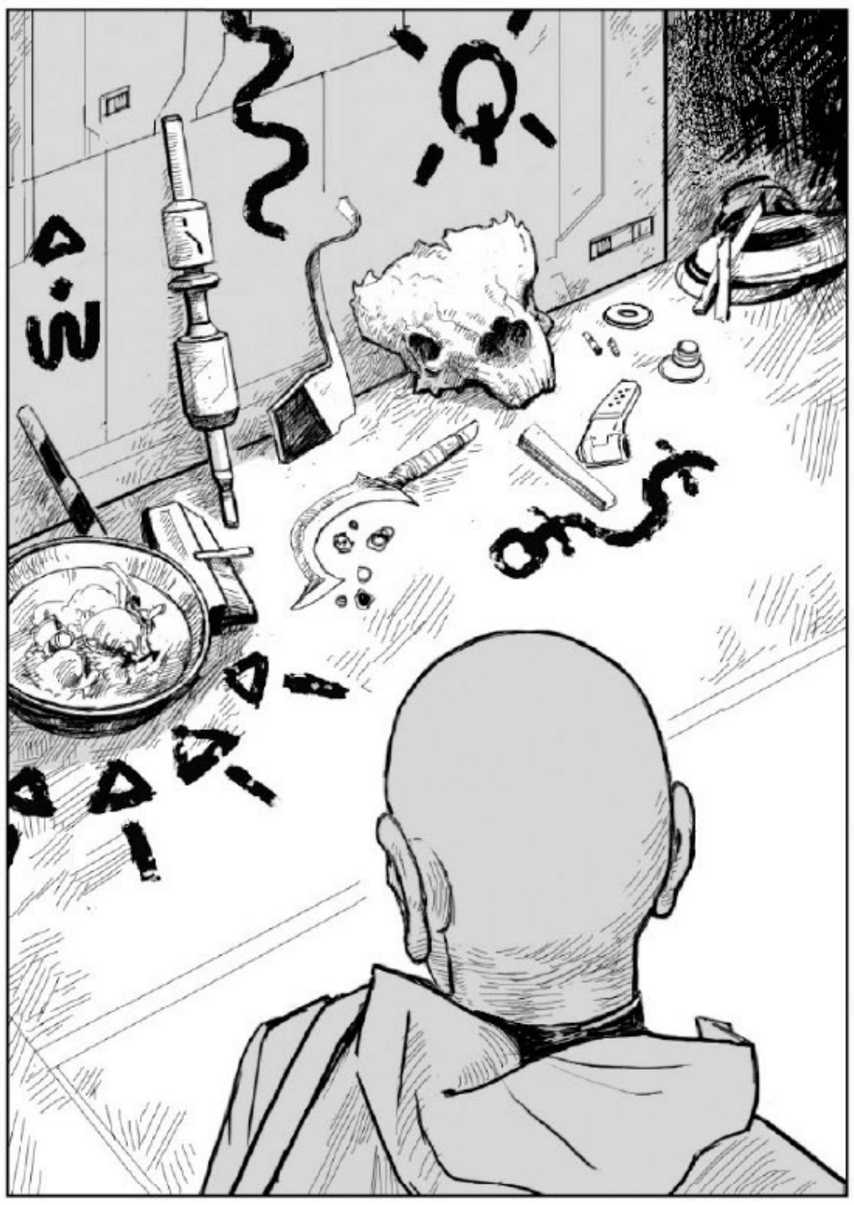
I COME WITH EMPTY HANDS, O SPIRITS OF THIS PLACE!

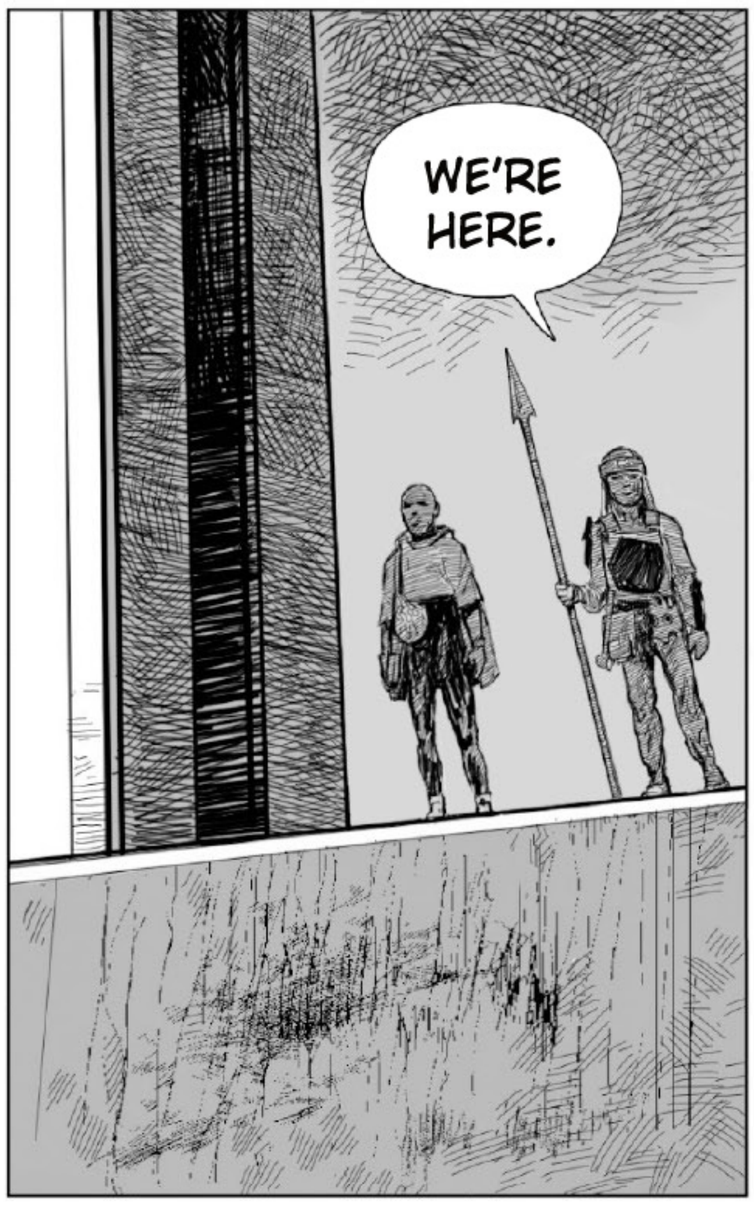
THEN WAIT FOR ME!

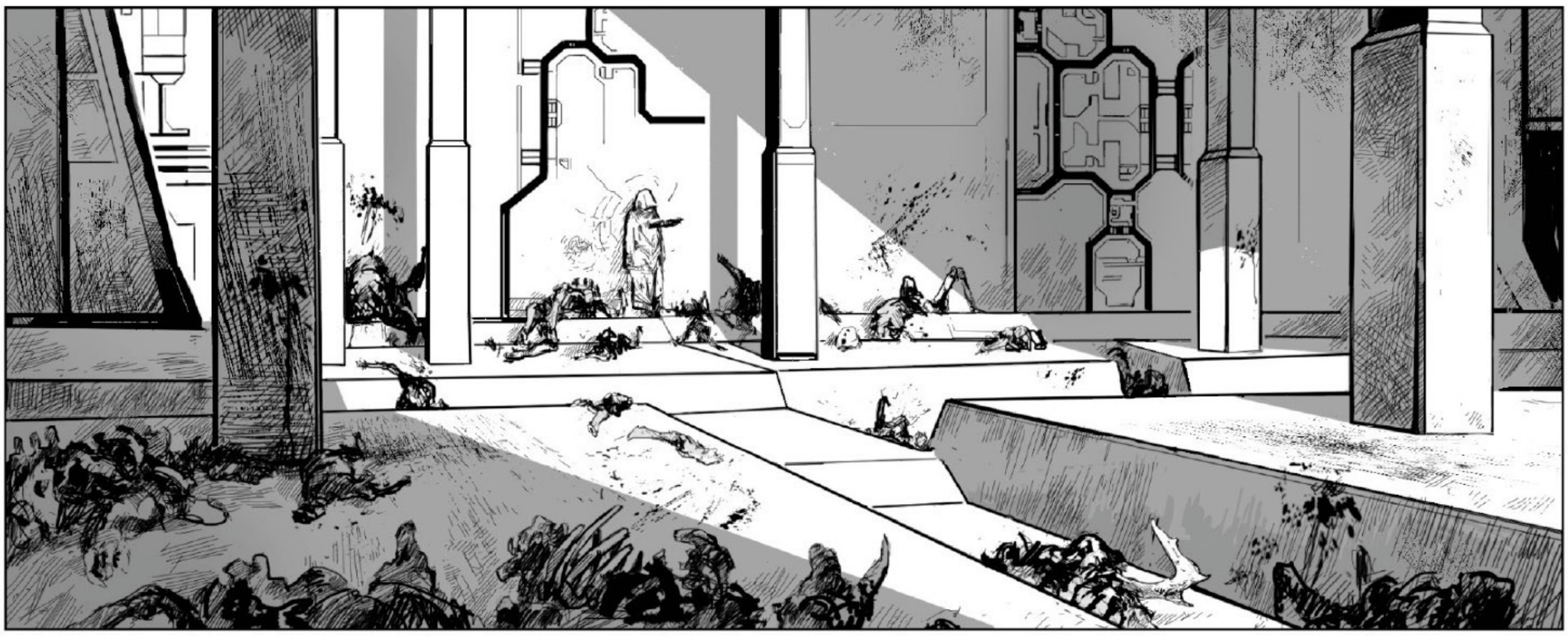
THE OTHERS AREN'T COMING?

NO. I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU DID, BUT THEY DON'T SEEM REASSURED...

THEY SEEM ALRIGHT.




WE'RE HERE.



CRUNK

BE CAREFUL, LUPO...

MY GOD, WHAT'S GOING ON WITH THAT FACE?

WELL, WHAT DO YOU THINK?

I DON'T KNOW. IT LOOKS LIKE NOTHING I'VE EVER SEEN.

IF IT'S A NOMAD, IT DOESN'T MATCH ANY OF THE DESCRIP-TIONS...

BUT THE MARK ON ITS ARM WAS MADE BY THE OEDS, I KNOW THAT MUCH.

SO HE'S LINKED TO THEM.

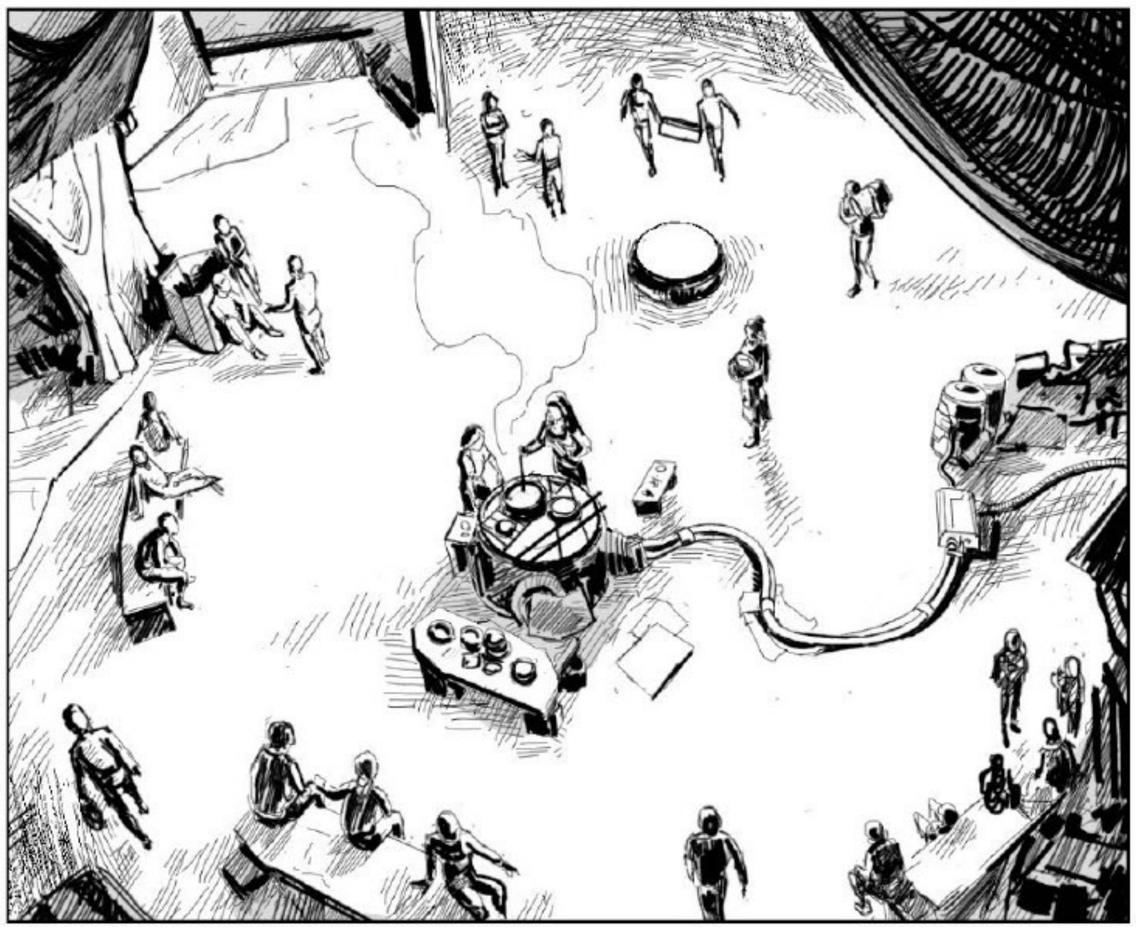
?

WHAT IS THIS?

NO IDEA. BUT IT LOOKS LIKE THAT... GUY'S SKIN. I'M KEEPING IT.

OKAY, WE'RE DONE HERE, LET'S GO.

WITH PLEASURE.



DAMN IT!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE, KID?

WHERE ARE YOUR PARENTS?

DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?

FSH

FSH

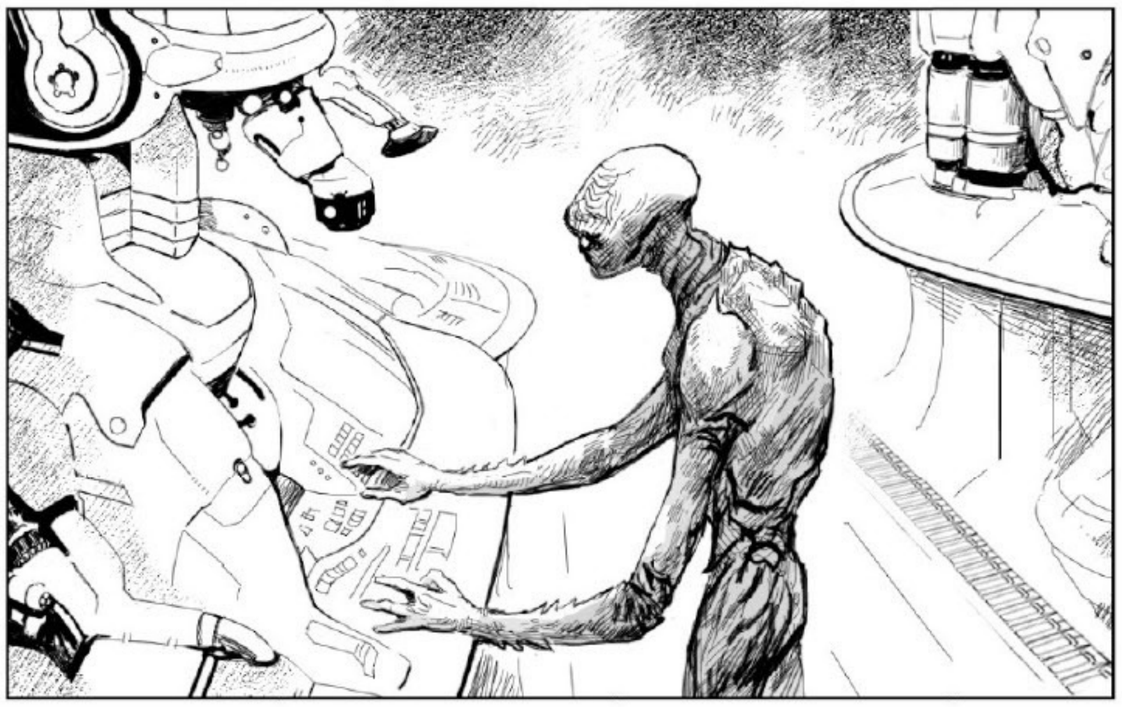
FSH

FSH

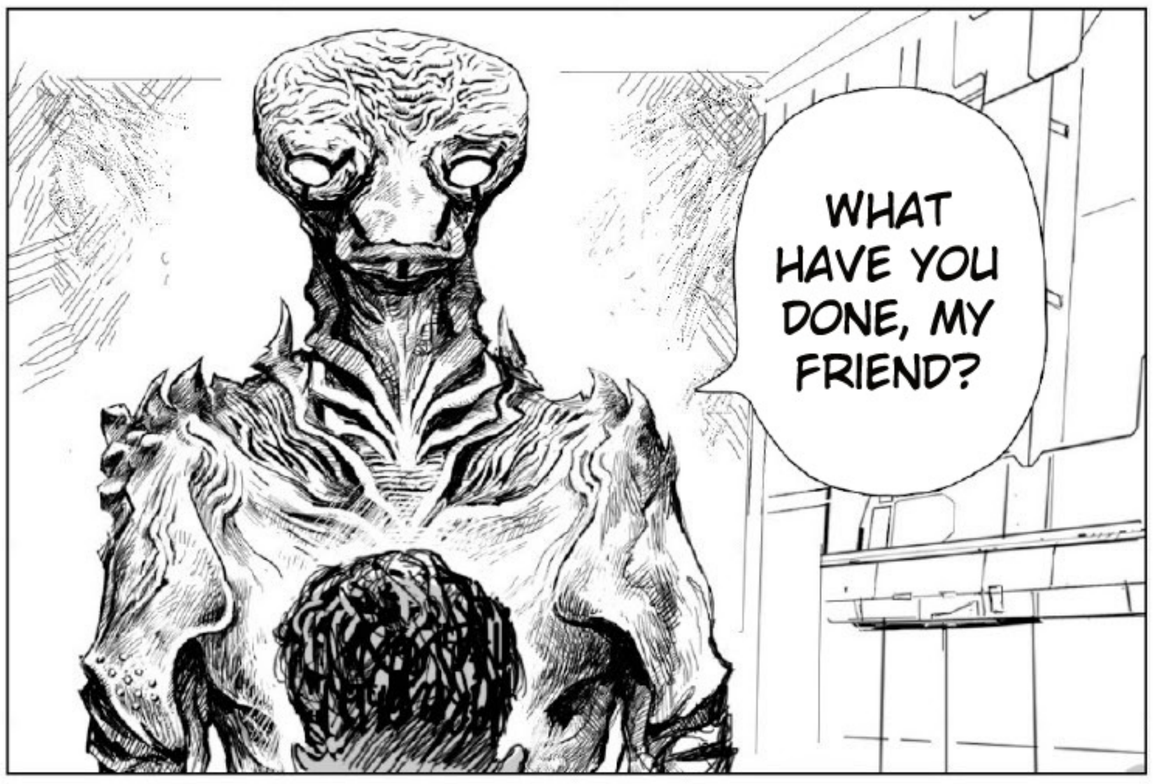
TAP

TAP

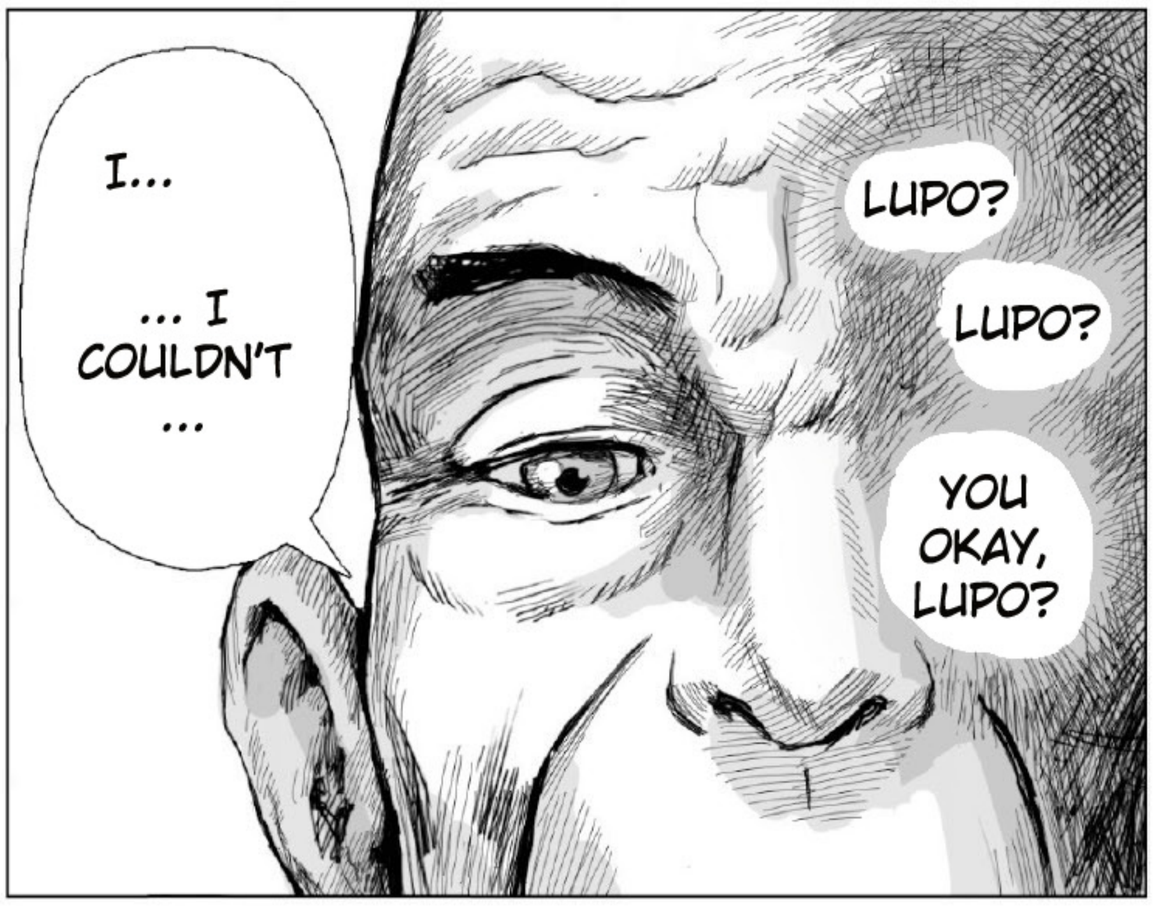
TAP

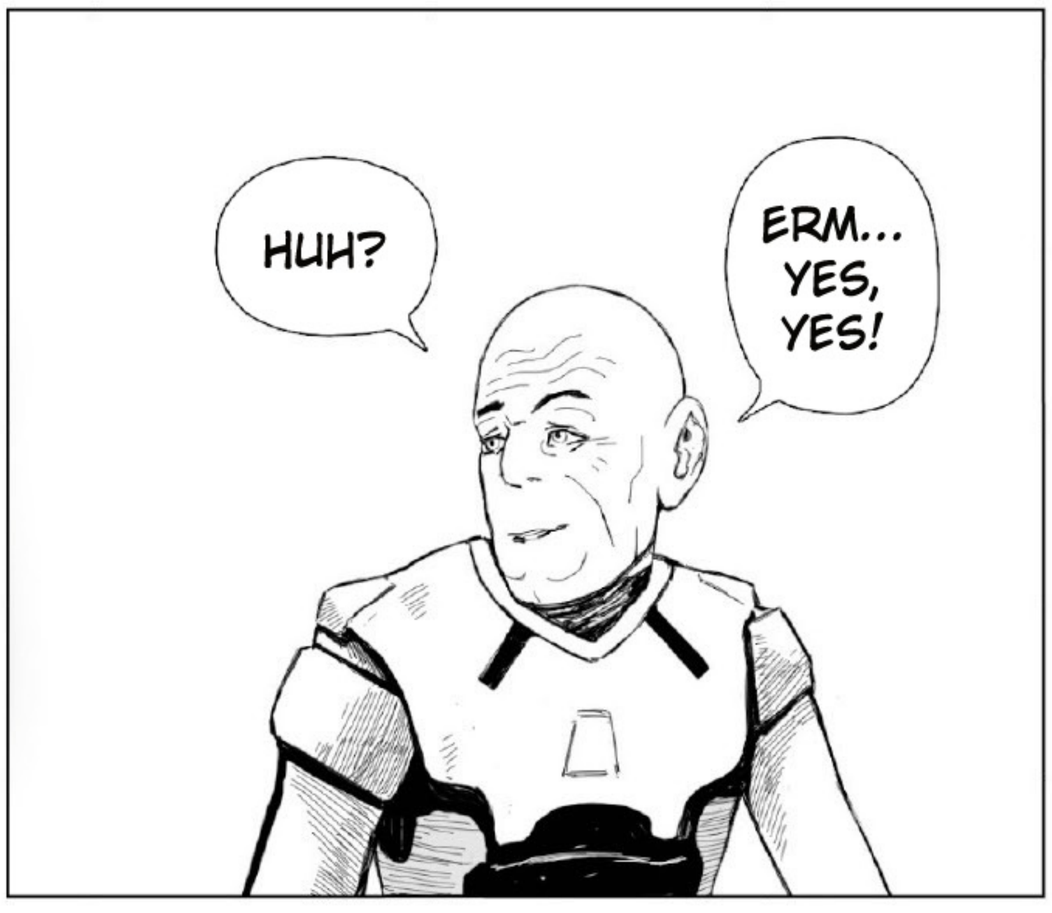


BLAM
IS THAT YOU, LUPO? I'M COMING!


WHAT HAVE YOU DONE, MY FRIEND?

I...


I...
... I COULDN'T ...
LUPO?
LUPO?
YOU OKAY, LUPO?


HUH?
ERM... YES, YES!

I WAS THINKING OF JENNA.

YOUR DAUGHTER?

YES, WELL... SHE'S NOT MY DAUGHTER, BUT SHE'S LIKE ONE TO ME...

I'M SURE YOU'LL FIND HER.

BUT FOR NOW, YOU NEED TO KEEP UP YOUR STRENGTH.

...

DON'T WORRY, WE EAT THIS STEW EVERY DAY. WE ONLY PUT EDIBLE ANIMALS IN IT! WELL, I THINK SO AT LEAST...

IT'S NOT THAT...

I'VE BEEN EATING NUTRIENT BARS FOR SO LONG...

I'M AFRAID I WON'T BE ABLE TO HANDLE MEAT VERY WELL...

IF I WERE YOU, I'D FORCE MYSELF... ASHA COOKS HERE...

AND BELIEVE ME, YOU'D BE BETTER OFF WITH FOOD POISONING THAN WITH HER PISSED OFF AT YOU...

BUT I GET THE FEELING SHE'S NOT UNINTERESTED IN YOU...

...

HUH?

WELL, YEAH! DON'T TELL ME YOU HAVEN'T SEEN HER LOOKING AT YOU SINCE WE GOT HERE?

AND I DON'T THINK SHE'S ALONE...

I'D PUT THAT DOWN TO CURIOSITY...

I NEVER THOUGHT...

I MEAN... I'VE LOST COUNT, BUT I'M AT LEAST... SEVENTY YEARS OLD? MAYBE MORE!

I DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS, BUT AS FAR AS I CAN TELL...

... YOU SEEM TO BE IN MUCH BETTER SHAPE THAN ANY OTHER MAN AMONG US...

FWWOOOOSHH

FWWOOOOS

!?

IS... IS THAT YOU, LUPO?

JENNA !

JENNA! IS THAT YOU? BUT HOW...? HOW IS THIS POSSIBLE?

LET ME LOOK AT YOU! YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED AT ALL, IT'S INCREDIBLE!

ARE YOU SURE ABOUT THAT, LUPO?

WASN'T I A LITTLE MORE BLONDE, IN YOUR MEMORIES? IT SUITS ME, RIGHT?

OR MAYBE A REDHEAD? WITH GREEN EYES?

POOR OLD LUPO, YOUR MEMORY'S REALLY PLAYING TRICKS ON YOU...

BUT... STOP IT, JENNA!

WHAT ARE YOU...

STOP CALLING ME JENNA!

YOU KNOW I'M NOT HER!

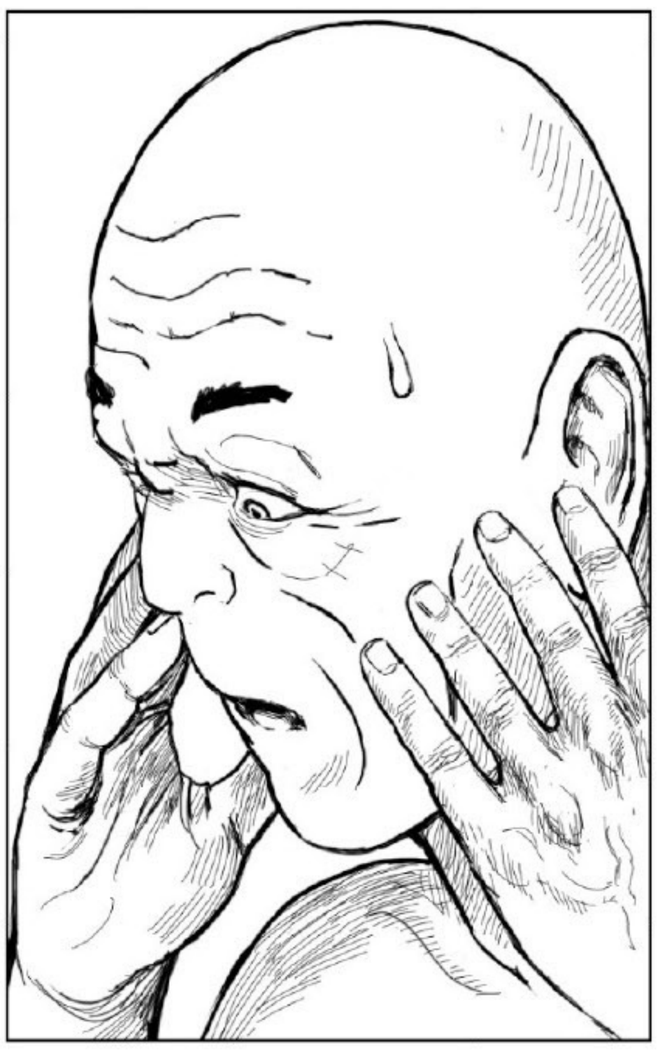
NO! WAIT! DON'T LEAVE M...

!

FLOTCH

WELL, LUPO?
DO YOU REMEMBER MY NAME NOW?

YES! YOU ARE JENNAAAAAA
RRIPP
HAAAAAAAAA



SLEEP WELL?

NOT REALLY. SEEMS LIKE I WAS RIGHT ABOUT THE MEAT.

RESTLESS NIGHT, HUH? THAT'S WHAT I HEARD...

THOSE KIDS HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU FOR A WHILE NOW.

THEY WANT TO TAKE YOU TO THEIR LEADER.

SEE YOU LATER, RAMM!

...

WE'RE HERE!

FWOOMMM

WE GET IN LIKE THIS?

YOU THOUGHT WE WERE DUMB, OLD MAN...

... BUT MA-ZOG THINKS OF EVERY-THING.

FSHHHHHHH

IF YOU WEREN'T WITH US, YOU'D BE DEAD-DEAD.

BIG-HEAD'LL ANSWER ALL YOUR QUESTIONS.

HE'S SO F...

BUNCH OF INCOMPETENTS! GOOD FOR NOTHINGS! INSECTS! I SHOULD EXTERMINATE YOU ALL!

ERM... MA-ZOG?

WHAT? WHO DARES INTER-RUPT ME?!

IT'S US. WE BROUGHT YOU THE OLD MAN.

WZii

WZi

WZii

SO THAT'S YOU, LUPO?

YES. AND SINCE I GUESS YOU'RE MA-ZOG, I CAME TO GIVE YOU THIS IN EXCHANGE FOR YOUR HELP.

YOU HAVE MY ATTENTION, SWEET LUPO... WHAT IS YOUR PROBLEM?

I NEED TO GET THROUGH ONE OF THE BLACK GATES TO REACH THE UNCONTAMINATED ZONE.

DO YOU KNOW HOW I CAN DO THAT?

OF COURSE! I AM AN OED.

AND HOW WOULD YOU KNOW? HAVE YOU EVER MET ONE?

...

I DOUBT THAT.

NO, BUT IF YOU REALLY WERE AN OED, YOU WOULDN'T BE ON THIS SIDE OF THE QUARANTINE...

... WITH THE "INSECTS".

I THINK YOU MAY HAVE WORKED FOR THE OEDS, BEFORE.

YOU SEEM VERY GIFTED WHEN IT COMES TO TECHNOLOGY.

YOU WERE AN ENGINEER, WEREN'T YOU?

...

I DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT THE OEDS... BUT I KNOW THEY ARE PRAGMATIC ENOUGH...

... TO RECRUIT GIFTED BEINGS WHENEVER THEY FIND THEM.

MY FRIEND PORO TAUGHT ME THAT...

REALLY?

... AN ESERETT.

A VERY INTELLIGENT RACE, THE ESERETTS...

... BUT RATHER UNFRIENDLY...

... I THOUGHT THEY WERE ALL DEAD.

LIKE THE OEDS...

DEAD, OR...

... GONE!

WHY SHOULD I BELIEVE YOU, SWEET LUPO?

HE WAS THE ONE WHO MADE THIS FOR ME.

HMMM, PERHAPS... PERHAPS...

CAN YOU SHOW ME HOW IT WORKS?

NO, I CAN'T. THE BATTERIES ARE ALMOST EMPTY AND THEY'RE VERY HARD TO REPLACE...

BUT I'LL GIVE IT TO YOU IF YOU CAN HELP ME GET THROUGH A TORANA.

WHICH BRINGS US BACK TO MY FIRST QUESTION...

... DO YOU KNOW HOW TO DO THAT?

YES.

BUT I NEED YOU TO DO ME A LITTLE FAVOUR.

...

WELL, WHAT? IS THAT GOING TO BE A PROBLEM?

... I THOUGHT THIS THING WOULD BE ENOUGH TO GET YOUR HELP...

TO BE HONEST...

AND THAT'S RIGHT, SWEET LUPO. YOU WOULDN'T BE HERE WITHOUT IT...

BUT TO GET THROUGH A TORANA, I NEED A VERY PARTICULAR COMPONENT.

AND I THINK YOU CAN BRING ME THAT COMPONENT.

FOR GOOD MEASURE, I'LL CHARGE UP THE BATTERIES ON YOUR DEVICE IF YOU AGREE...

YOU DON'T LEAVE ME MUCH CHOICE, DO YOU?

BUT IT'S A DEAL.

I'LL BRING YOU THAT COMPONENT, WHATEVER IT TAKES...

... BUT YOU HAD BETTER HONOUR YOUR END...

BELIEVE ME.

WHERE CAN I FIND THIS COMPO-NENT?

IN THE DARK ZONE...

SHEB, FASS AND DEEKA WILL TAKE YOU THERE...

HUH? BUT...

BUT WHAT, SHEB?

NOTHING.

GIVE ME THE BATTERY, LUPO. I'LL TAKE A LOOK AT IT.

IN THE DARK ZONE, HUH?

YES. YOU KNOW IT?

OF COURSE.

BUT I'VE NEVER BEEN THERE.

NO-ONE'S EVER BEEN THERE.

THEY CALL IT THAT...

... SO MANY THAT THE GROUND IS BLACK WITH CORPSES...

... BECAUSE IT'S PACKED WITH CZARNS AND DRONES FIGHTING A PERPETUAL WAR...

I KNOW...

THAT'S MORE OR LESS WHAT THE KIDS TOLD ME.

AND THAT HASN'T PUT YOU OFF GOING?

I DON'T HAVE A CHOICE, RAMM...

AND I KNOW YOU WOULD DO THE SAME FOR YOUR PEOPLE...

DON'T BE SO SURE...

WHEN ARE YOU LEAVING?

AS SOON AS I'M READY.

THEN, WITH A HEAVY HEART, LET ME SAY GOODBYE AND GOOD LUCK...

BECAUSE I KNOW WE WON'T SEE EACH OTHER AGAIN.

IS THIS IT?

YES, IN HERE IT'S THE BLACK ZONE.

YOU SURE, SHEB? SEEMS TOO CALM...

SURE-SURE, OLD MAN! WHAT WERE YOU EXPECTING?

GO FURTHER, YOU'LL FIND THE UGLIES.

LOTS OF 'EM.

LET ME REMIND YOU THAT MA-ZOG GAVE YOU A JOB: TAKE ME AS FAR AS POSSIBLE INTO THE DARK ZONE...

HEHE!

YES.

BUT WE THREE GO NO FURTHER.

WHAT'RE YOU GONNA DO, LUPO?

COME BACK WITH US AND COMPLAIN?

BESIDES, I'M NOT LYING...

KEEP GOING THAT WAY, YOU'LL FIND UGLIES AND DRONES.

SURE-SURE!

YOU GOTTA BE ONE OR THE OTHER TO SURVIVE IN THERE...

AND HOW AM I MEANT TO RECOGNISE THE DRONE I'M LOOKING FOR?

LIKE BIG-HEAD SAID: IT'S THE BIGGEST ONE. YOU CAN'T MISS IT.

PSHH

PCHH

FSHH

FSHHH

BROMM

WOOOOSHH

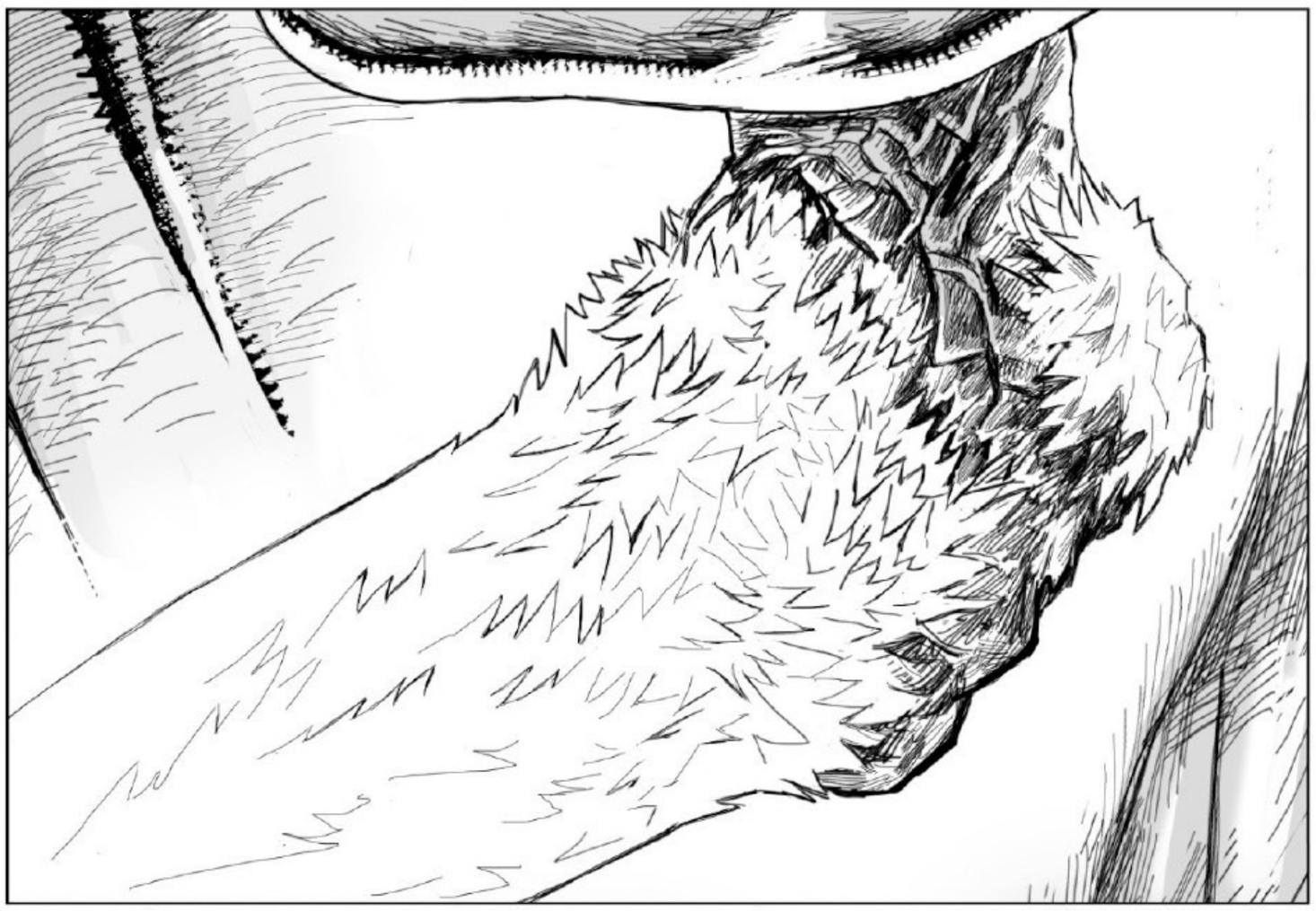
FSHHH

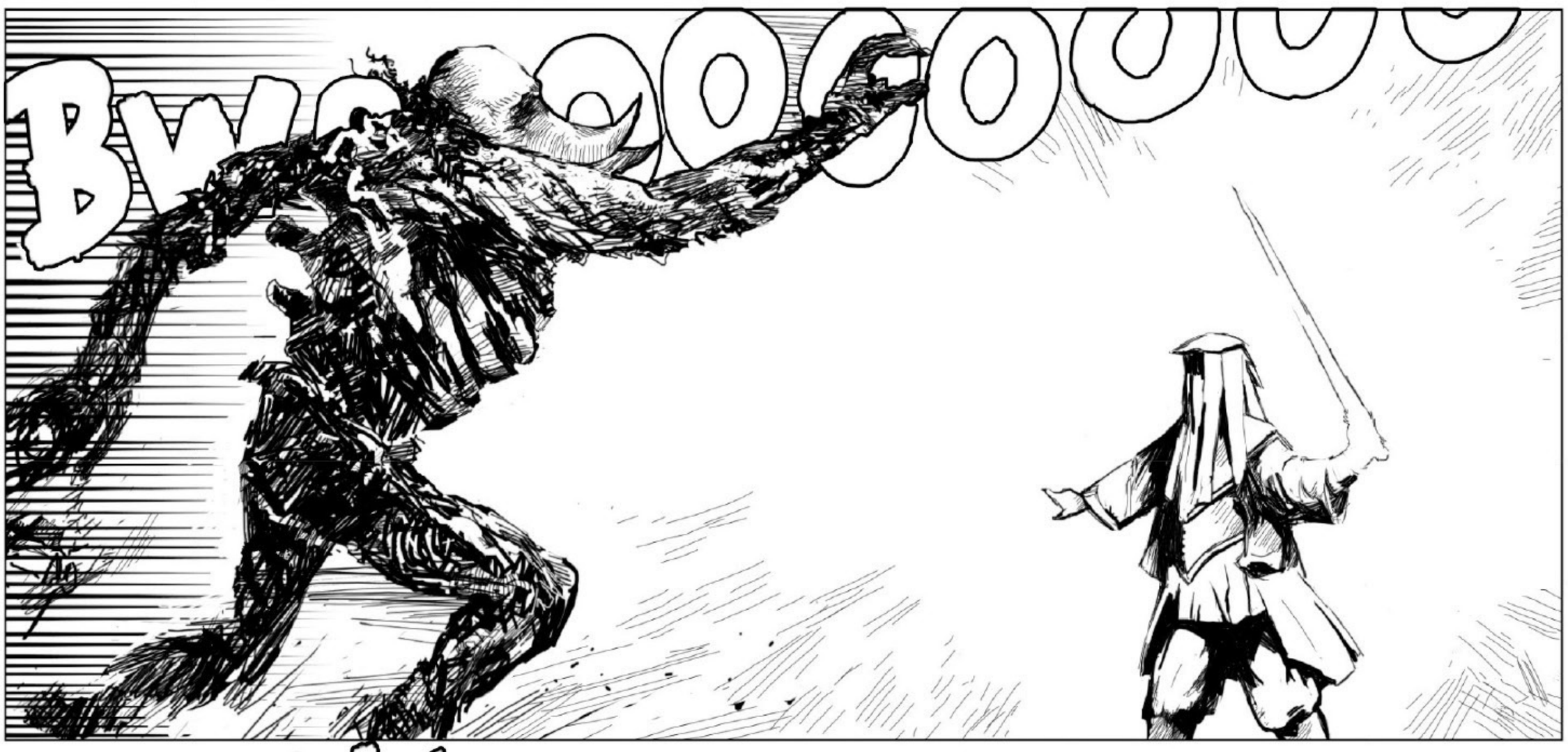
PSHH

BROMMM

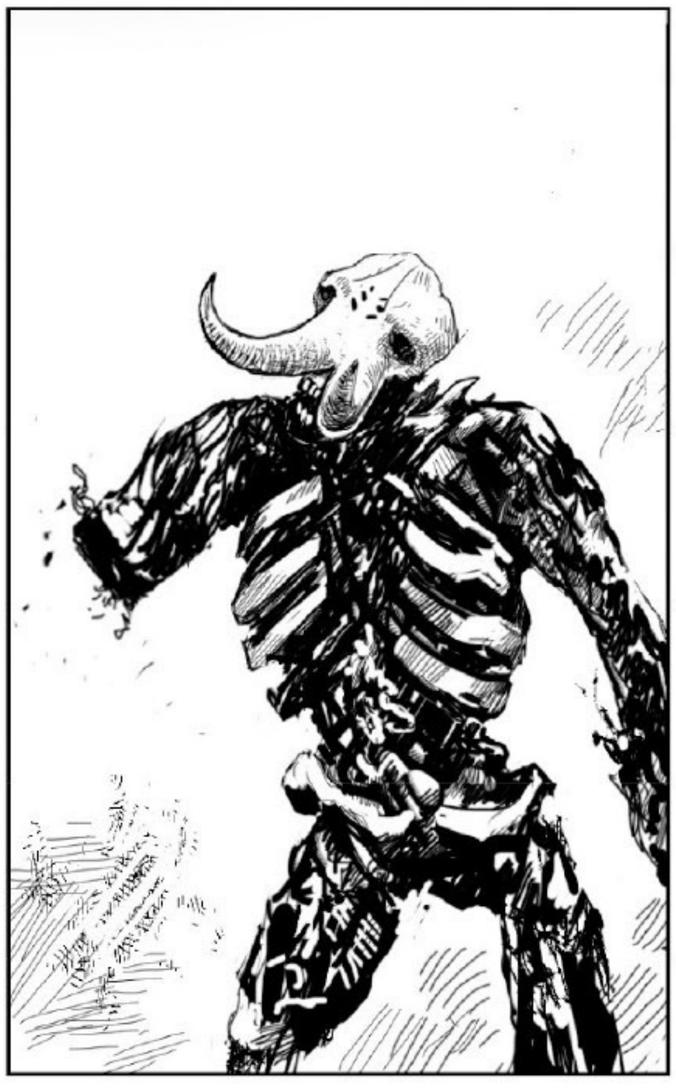
?

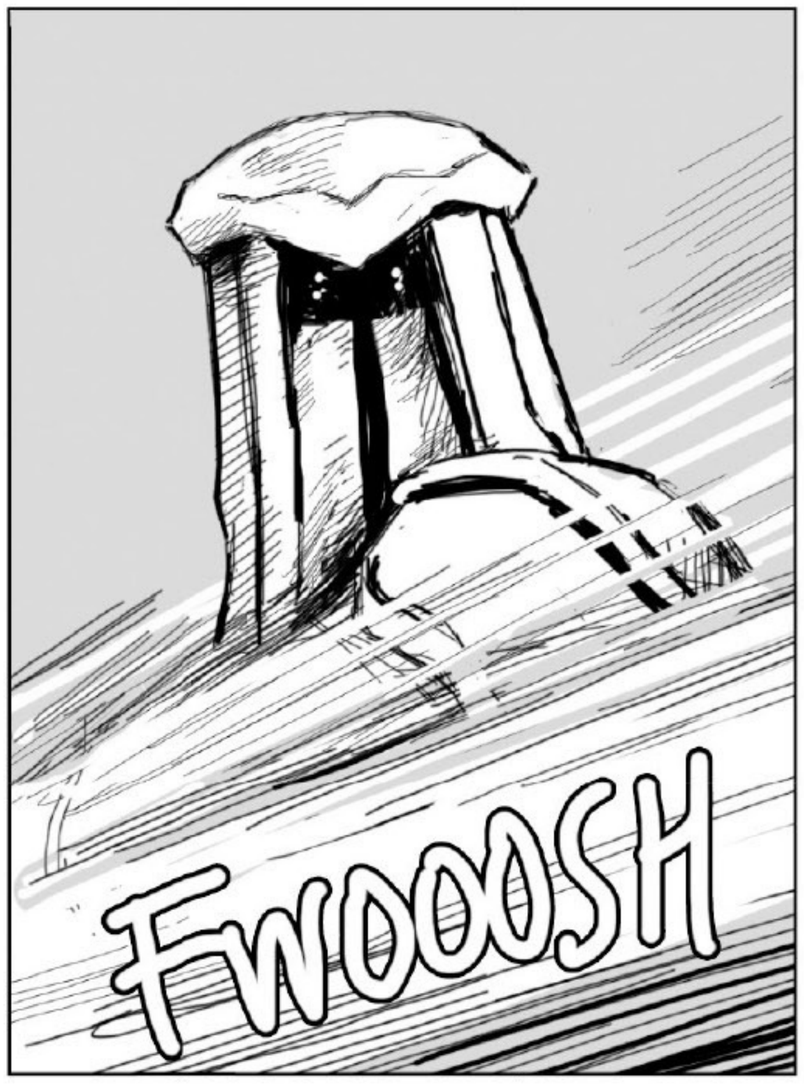
FZZZZ
WOOOO




BWOOOOOOOOOO

RAKK

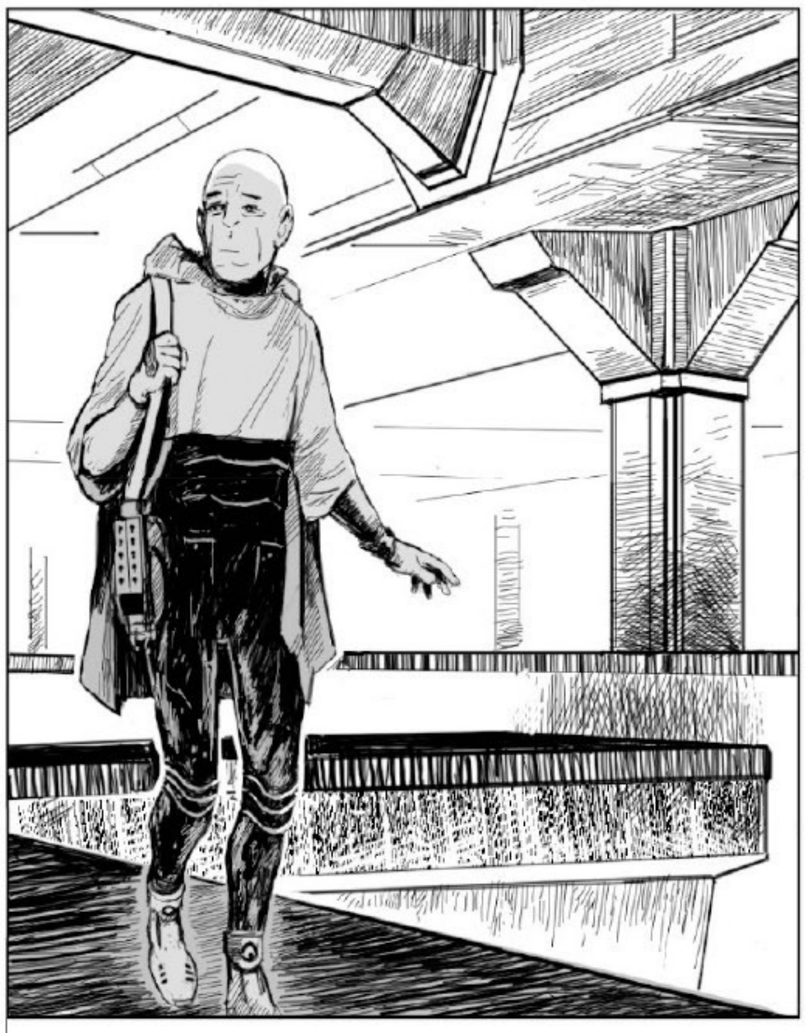



FWOOOSH

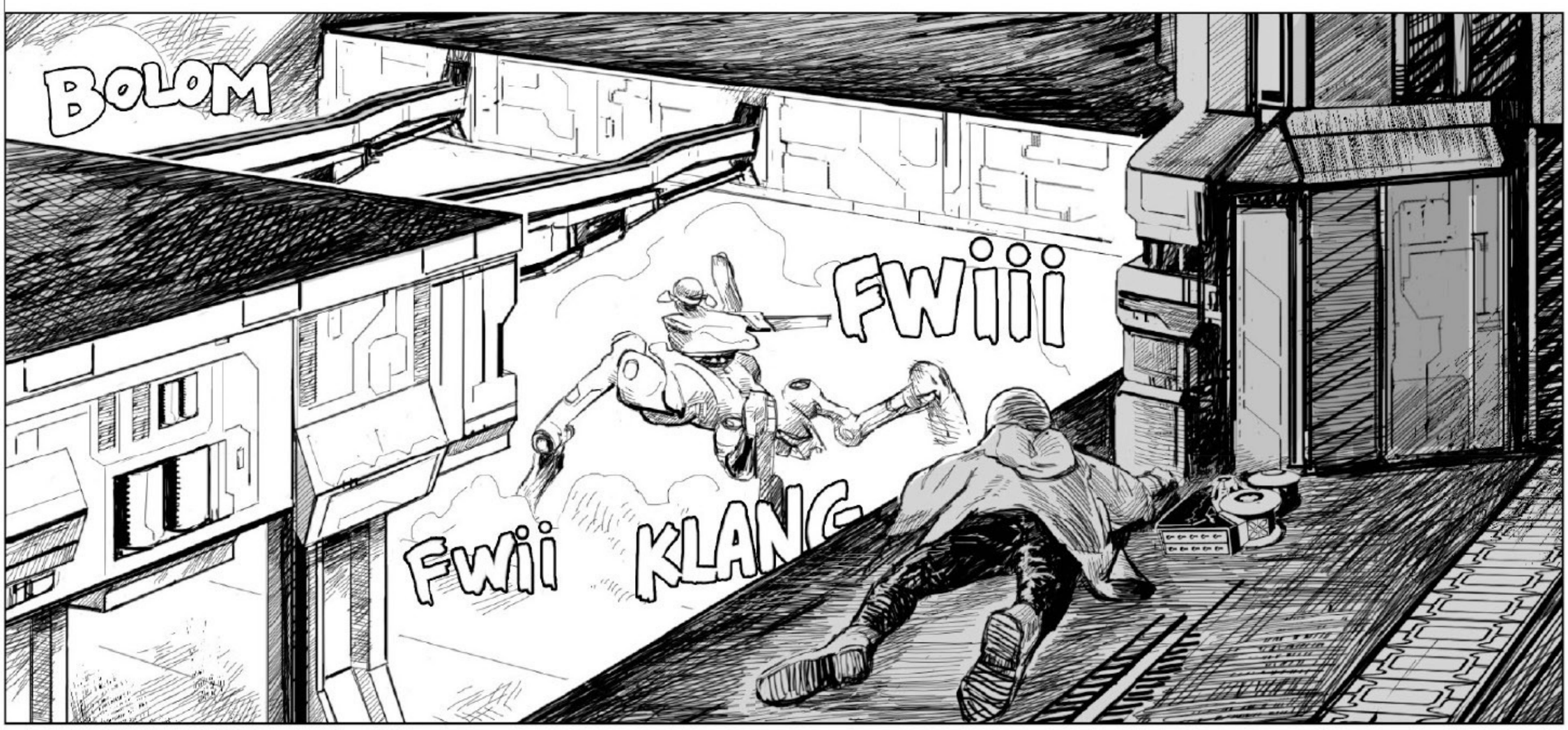
VLOTCH

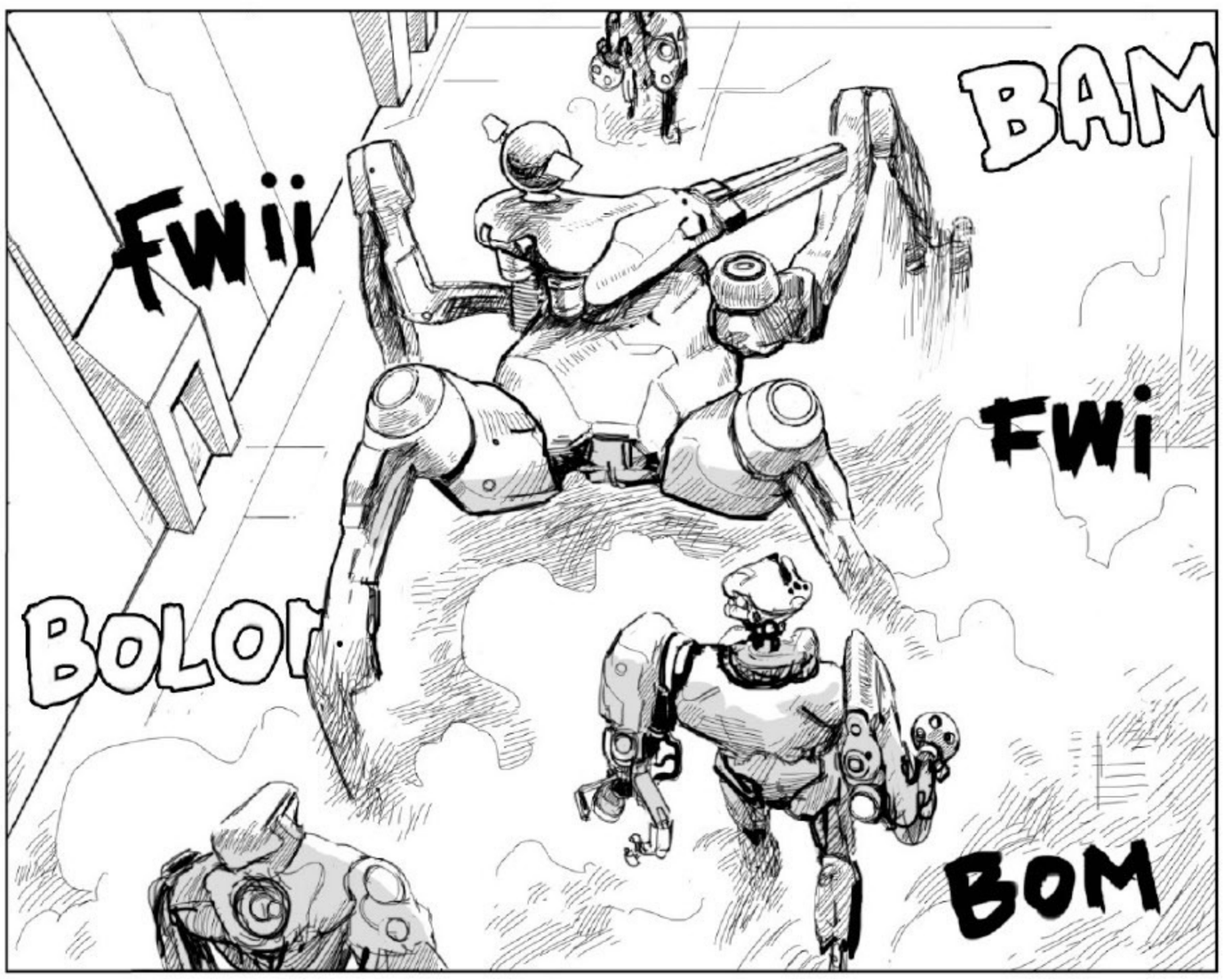
PROTCH

SPLOT



!
KLANG
BAM


BOLOM
FWiii
FWii
KLANG


FWii
BAM
FWi
BOLOM
BOM

ALRIGHT, WELL AT LEAST IT LOOKS LIKE I'M HEADING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION...

I'VE NEVER SEEN DRONES LIKE THIS BEFORE... ARE THEY COMBAT MODELS?

fwiii

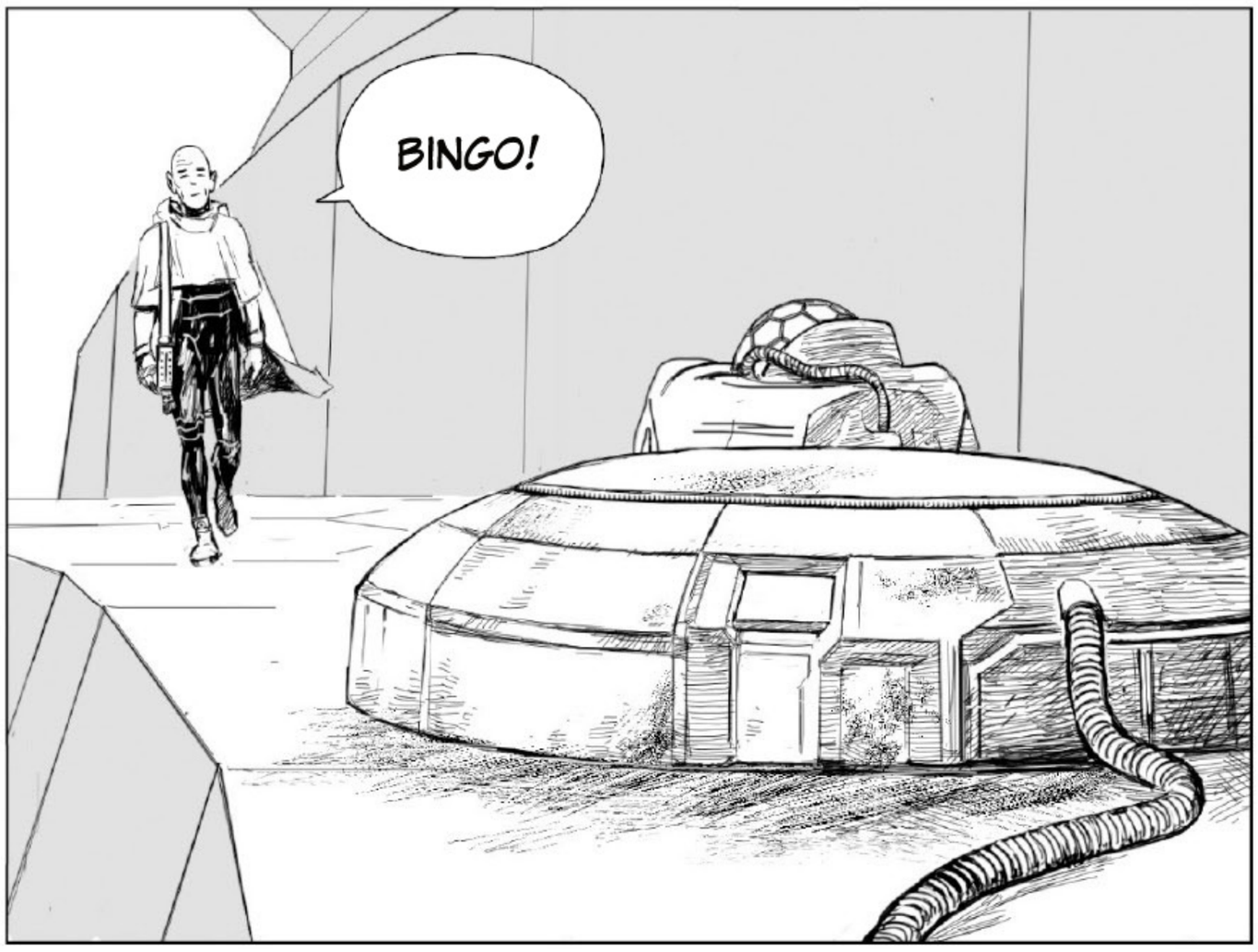
BROOM

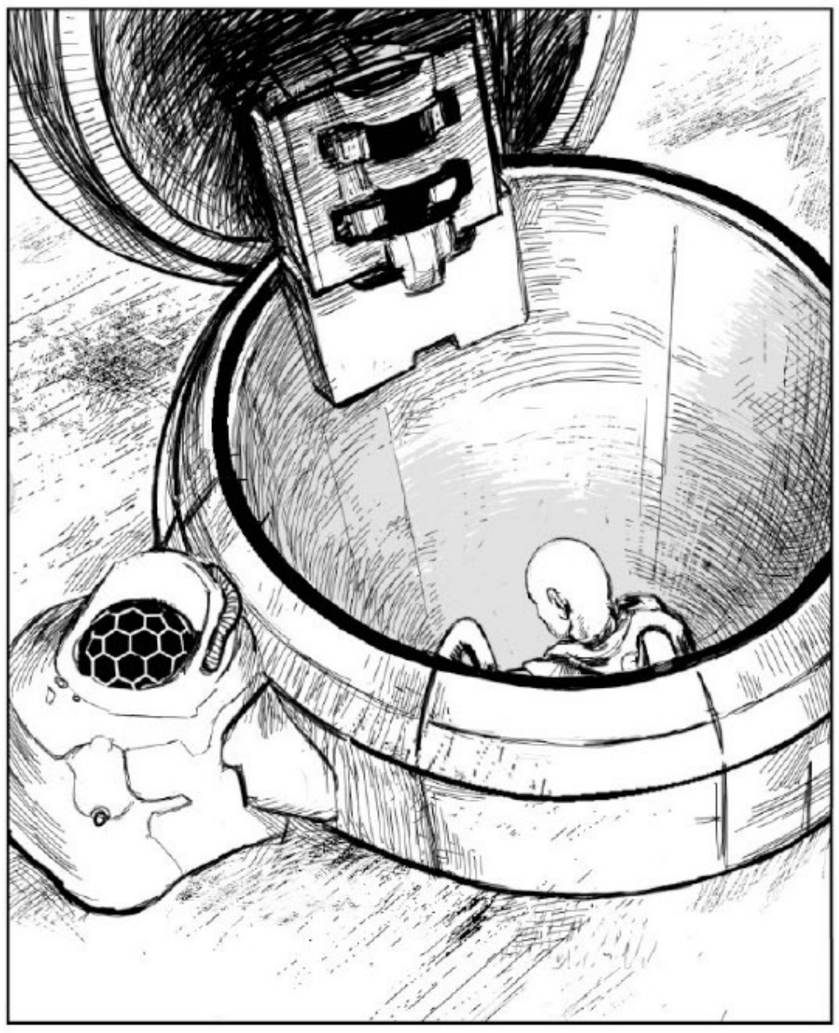
THOSE WERE THE LAST ONES... TIME TO MOVE.

IF IT'S DRONES, FINE. BUT WHAT IF I RUN INTO ANY SHADOWS?

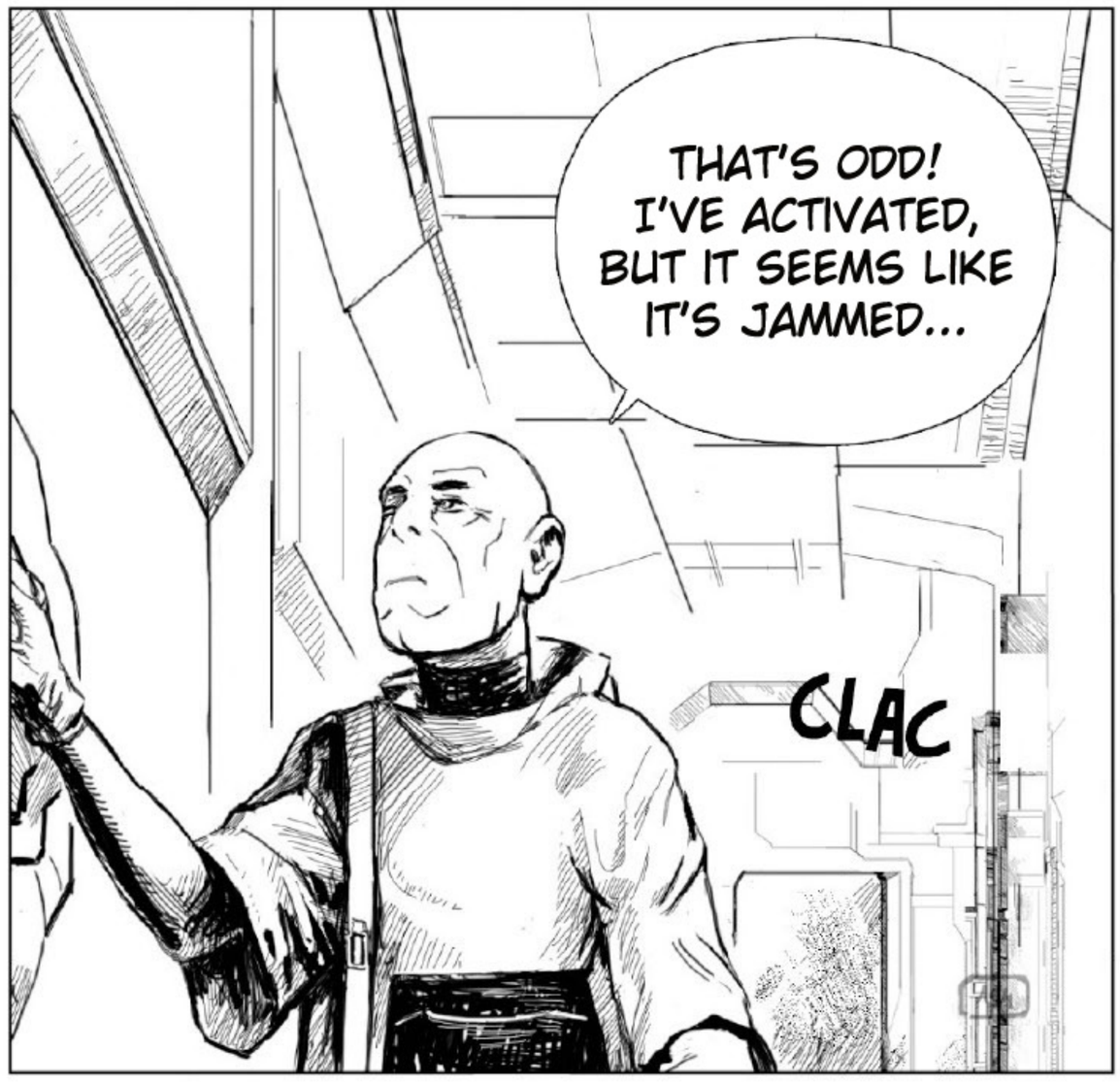
I'M FAR TOO EXPOSED LIKE THIS.

IF I CAN REACH THOSE DUCTS UP THERE...


BINGO!



?
CLAC


THAT'S ODD!
I'VE ACTIVATED,
BUT IT SEEMS LIKE
IT'S JAMMED...
CLAC

IF I'M READING THIS RIGHT, I CAN GET OUT HERE, AND GET BACK IN THE DUCT FURTHER ON.

IT'S THAT OR GO BACK THE WAY I CAME...

LOOKS LIKE IT'S THIS WAY...

IT'S GETTING PRETTY TIGHT IN HERE...

... AND STEEP. COME ON, YOU CAN DO THIS!

OOF! GOOD TO...

GOT YOU!

RRRK

I TOOK MY TIME, BUT I FINALLY CAUGHT YOU, LITTLE MAN!

PRETTY GOOD IDEA, JAMMING THE DOOR, RIGHT? I KNEW YOU'D HAVE TO COME THIS WAY!

RHRRHRR

PAF

PAF

OH YEAH, I'D BETTER NOT KILL YOU...

I'LL PUT YOU DOWN, BUT IF YOU TRY TO RUN AWAY, I'LL BREAK BOTH YOUR LEGS...

THAT'D BE DUMB AFTER ALL THE EFFORT I WENT TO TO GET YOU.

KOF ! KOF !

UNDERSTOOD!

THERE'S ONE THING I DON'T GET: YOU'VE BEEN FOLLOWING ME FOR A WHILE? BUT WHY? WHAT DO YOU WANT WITH ME?

IT'S NOT YOU, IT'S YOUR GUN I WANT.

BUT IT'S NOT A GU... OH, WHO CARES...

ARE YOU TAKING THE PISS?

I SAW YOU USE IT ON THE BRIDGE.

SHALL I PULL THE TRIGGER AND SEE IF YOU'RE TELLING THE TRUTH?

DO IT IF YOU LIKE, BUT NOT WHILE YOU'RE POINTING IT AT ME!

BEHIND YOU!

!

BAM

TCHAC

RHAAAA

I TOLD YOU IT WASN'T A GUN, YOU IMBECILE!

I'LL FIND YOU AGAIN, LITTLE MAN!

AAAARGH, LET ME GO, YOU PIECE OF SHIT!

PAF PAF

TititiTiTi

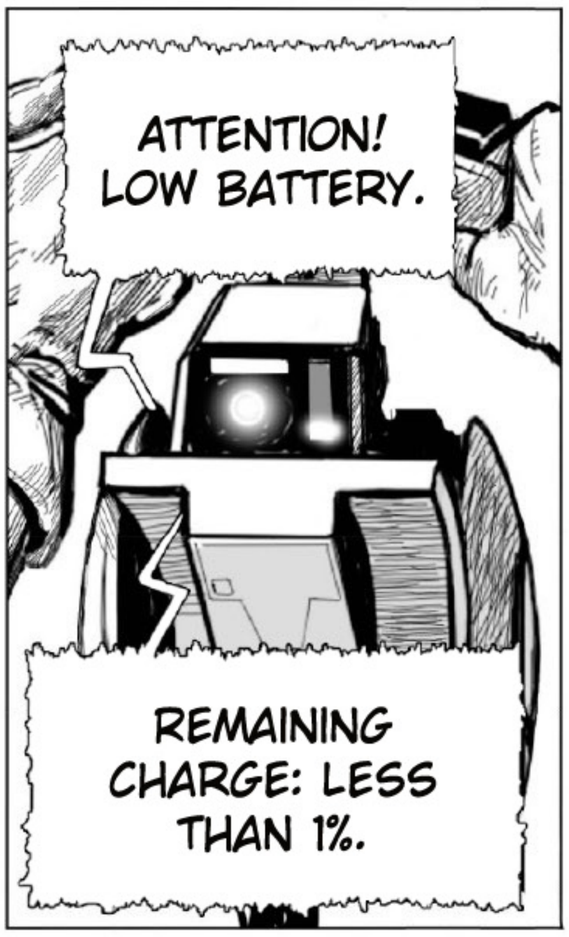
Biiiiip

ANTIGRAVITY REACTIVATED.

WZiiiiiiiii

Wziiiiiii

??
Bip
Bip


ATTENTION! LOW BATTERY.
REMAINING CHARGE: LESS THAN 1%.

MA-ZOG! YOU BASTARD!
PLEASE LAND AS SOON AS POSSIBLE...

THERE?

Wziiii

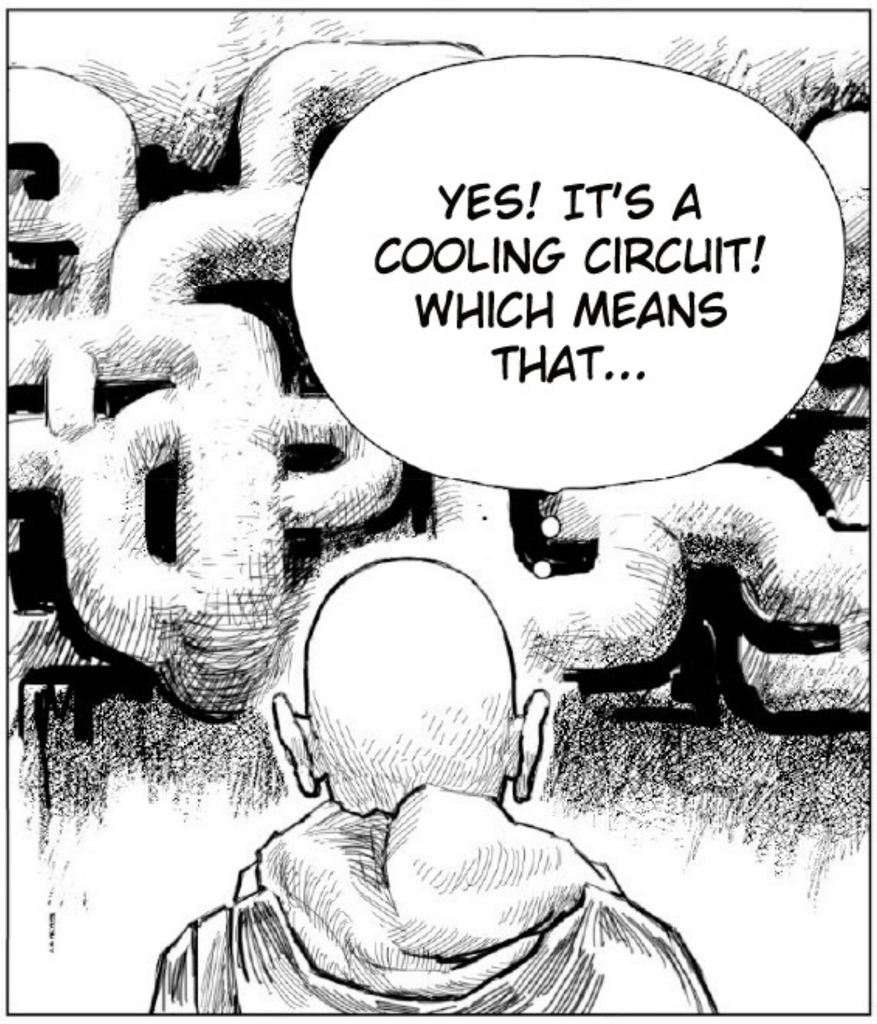
TAP TAP TAP

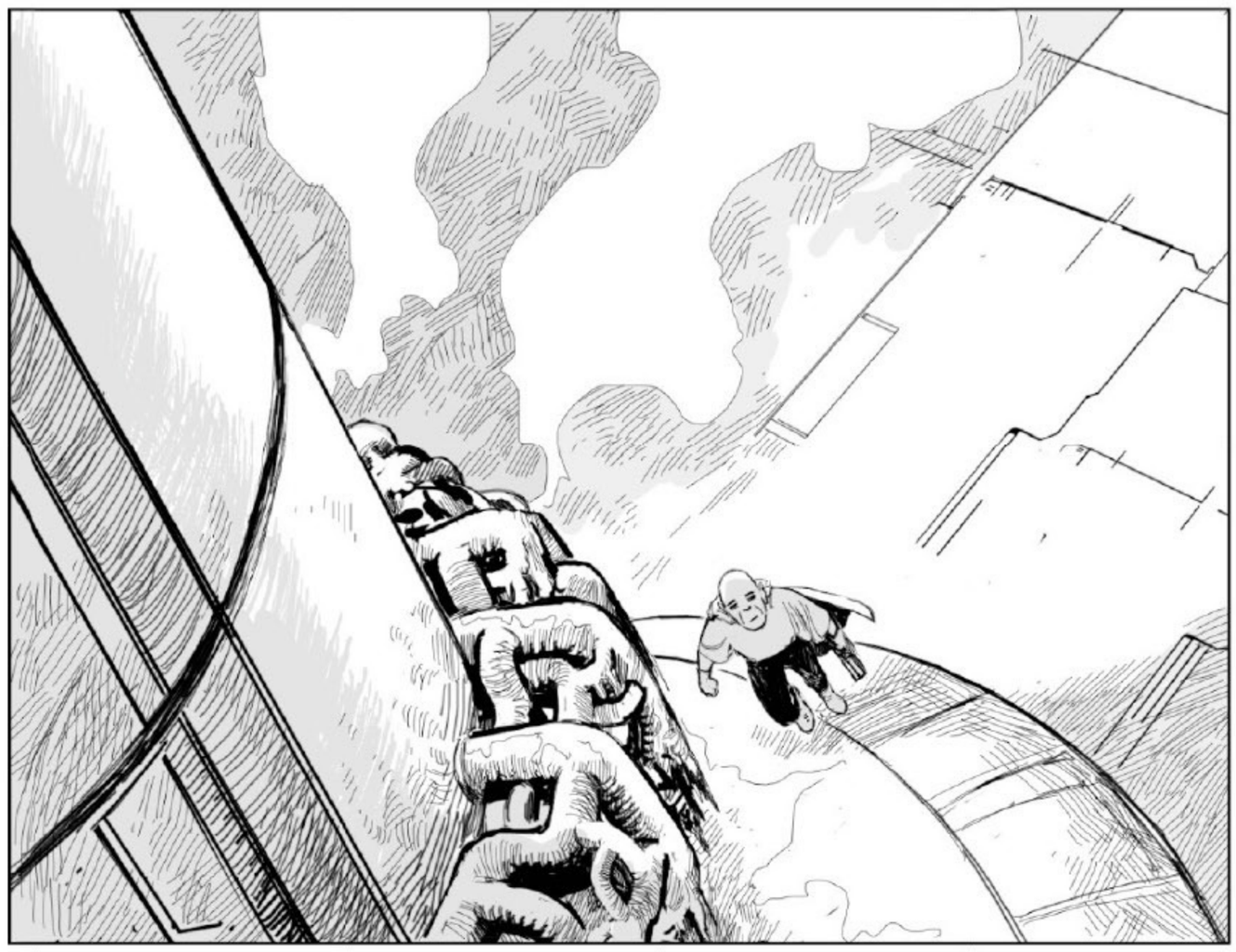
PFFF... AT THIS POINT, IS IT EVEN WORTH LUGGING THIS THING AROUND?

COME ON, IT'S NOT THAT HEAVY... YOU NEVER KNOW!

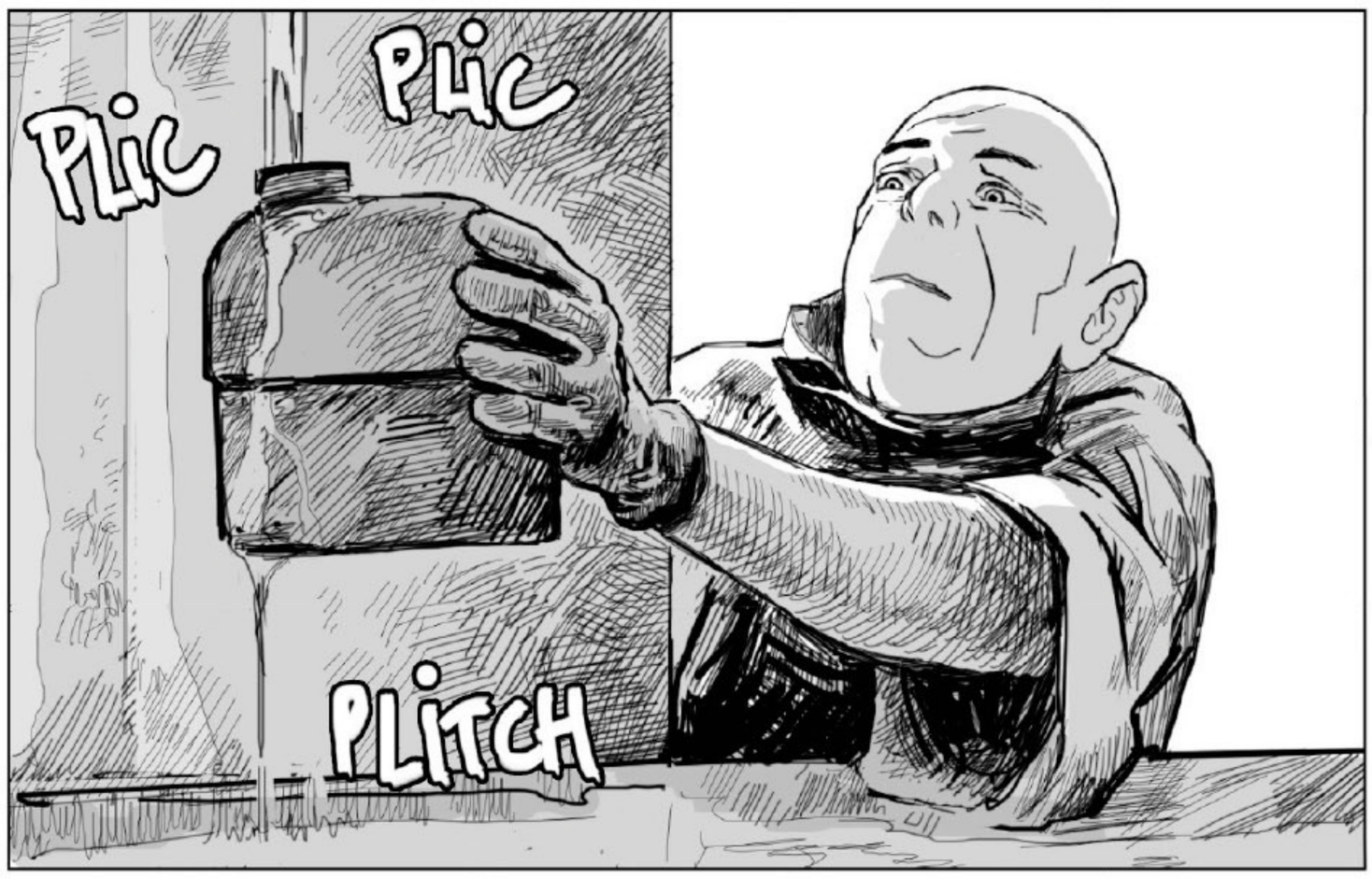
I THINK IT'S THAT WAY...

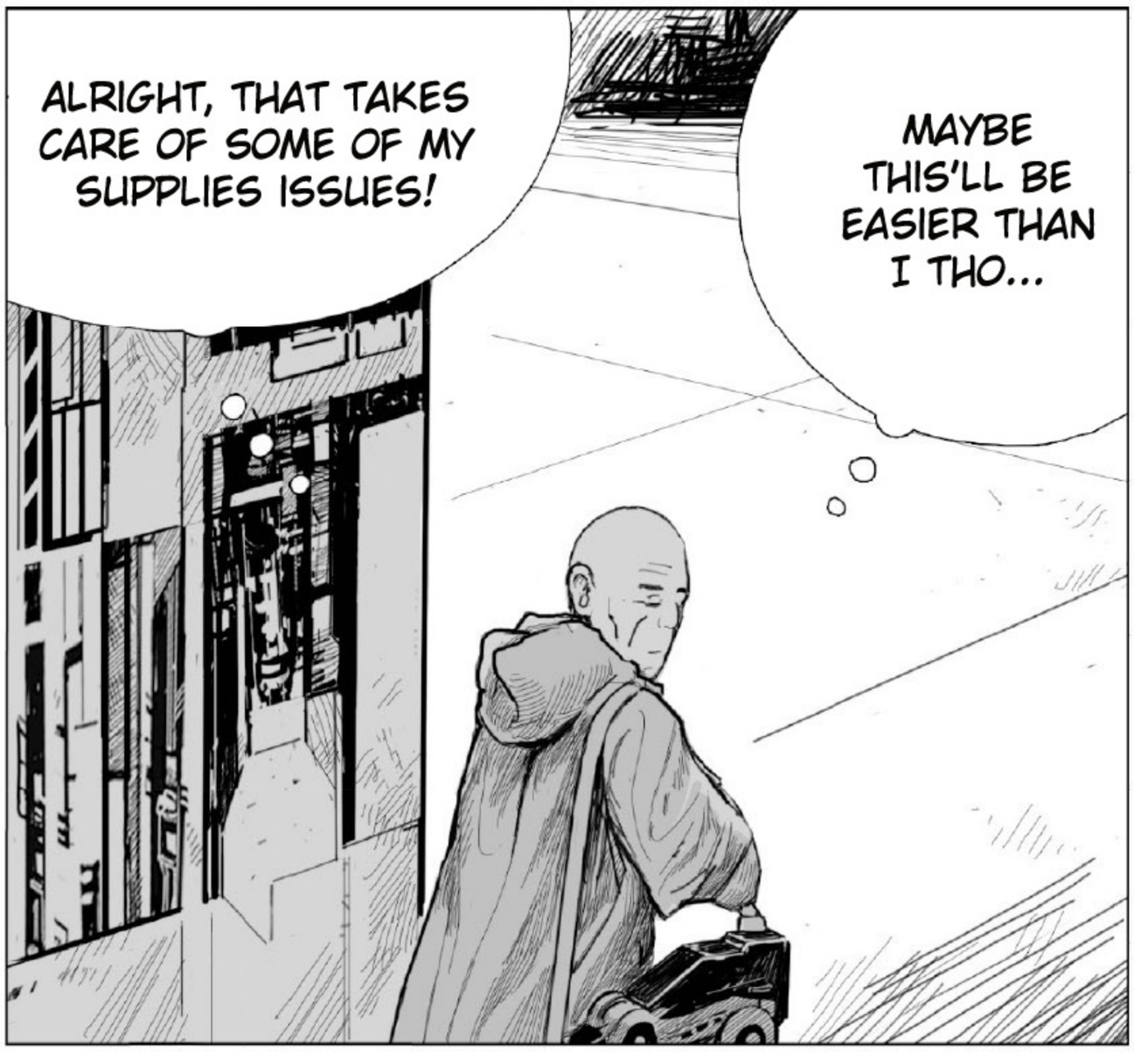
THAT STEAM... I THINK I'VE SEEN THAT KIND OF MACHINE BEFORE...


YES! IT'S A COOLING CIRCUIT! WHICH MEANS THAT...



KLANG


PLIC
PLIC
PLITCH


ALRIGHT, THAT TAKES CARE OF SOME OF MY SUPPLIES ISSUES!
MAYBE THIS'LL BE EASIER THAN I THO...

MWOOOOOOO

I'M SAFE FOR NOW... BUT WHAT NEXT?

RUMBLE

KRAH

THE WAY OUT! NOT A MOMENT TOO SOON! I'M GONNA TAKE A NAP... I'M BEAT...

?

WHAT... THAT SHAPE?

I DON'T BELIEVE IT!

HEY, LITTLE MAN!

I TOLD YOU...

... I'D FIND YOU AGAIN...

BUT I DIDN'T THINK IT'D BE THIS SOON...

ME NEITHER...

BUT HOW'D YOU DO IT?

I BASHED HIM ON THE HEAD UNTIL HE LET ME GO... SIMPLE AS THAT.

NO: HOW DID YOU MANAGE TO FIND ME?

I DON'T KNOW, LITTLE MAN... I JUST FEEL YOUR PRESENCE, THAT'S ALL...

WHEREVER YOU ARE, I FEEL IT... AND WHEN YOU'RE REALLY CLOSE...

... IT BURNS ME. IT MAKES ME WANT TO MAKE YOU GO AWAY... VIOLENTLY...

!

AH! I SEE. THAT'S ANNOYING...

??

I THOUGHT I'D GET RID OF YOU BY GIVING YOU MY... GUN...

DOESN'T REALLY WORK ANYMORE ANYWAY...

WHAT HAPPENED TO IT?

I JUST TRUSTED THE WRONG PERSON. THAT'S ALL.

DOES THAT CHANGE YOUR PLANS, LITTLE MAN?

NO.

NOT REALLY.

ANYWAY, I HAVE NO CHOICE...

SO TAKE THE GUN, ATTACK ME...

... OR LET ME PAST!

BUT DON'T JUST STAND THERE!

I HAVE A GOAL AND YOU'RE WASTING MY TIME.

HAHAHA!

IS IT YOUR GOAL THAT'S BROUGHT YOU SO DEEP INTO THE BLACK ZONE?

YES.

IT'S RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE... SURROUNDED BY SHADOWS AND DRONES...

MORE THAN YOU COULD COUNT.

THAT SOUNDS LIKE FUN.

I THINK I'M GOING TO COME WITH YOU.

EEERM... YOU SURE?

I MEAN... IT'S A LITTLE ODD...

NOT FIVE MINUTES AGO YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT KILLING ME... VIOLENTLY...

...

I DON'T KNOW...

SEEMS LIKE YOU ATTRACT TROUBLE... AND ACTION.

AND I LIKE WHEN THINGS REALLY SWING.

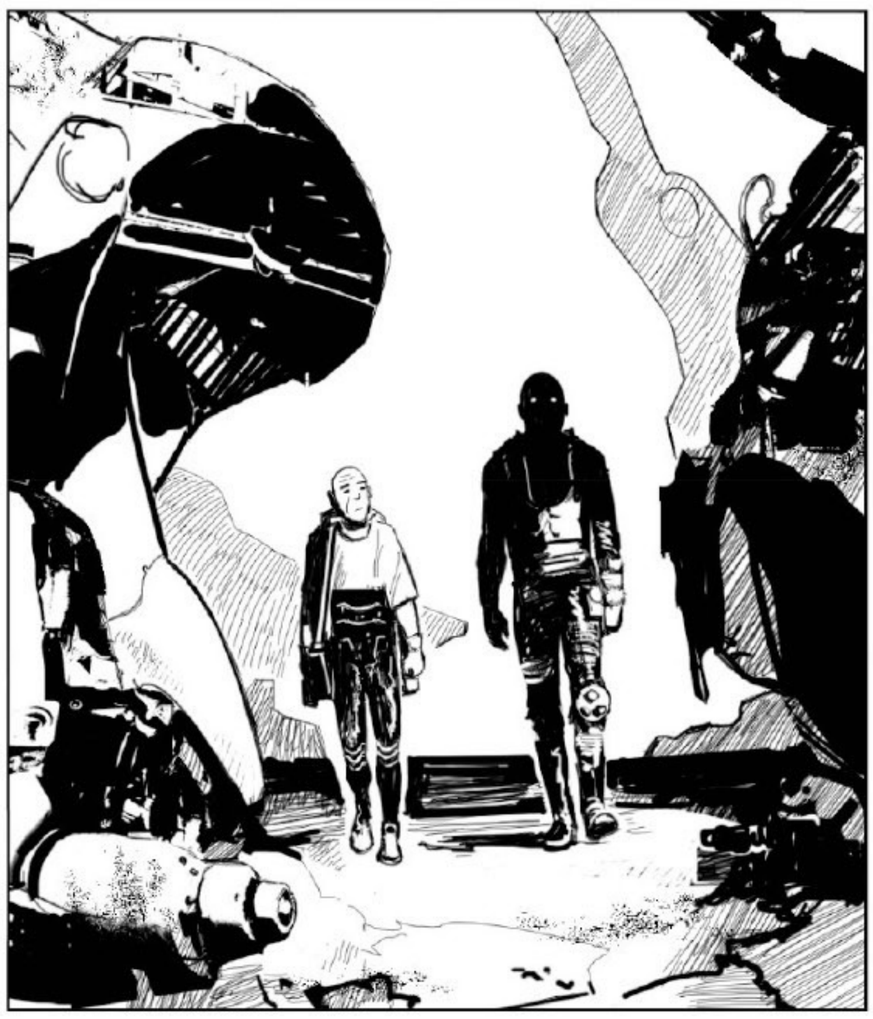
AND... IF MY URGE TO KILL YOU COMES BACK... AND IT GETS SERIOUS...

AT LEAST I WON'T HAVE TO RUN AFTER YOU!

...

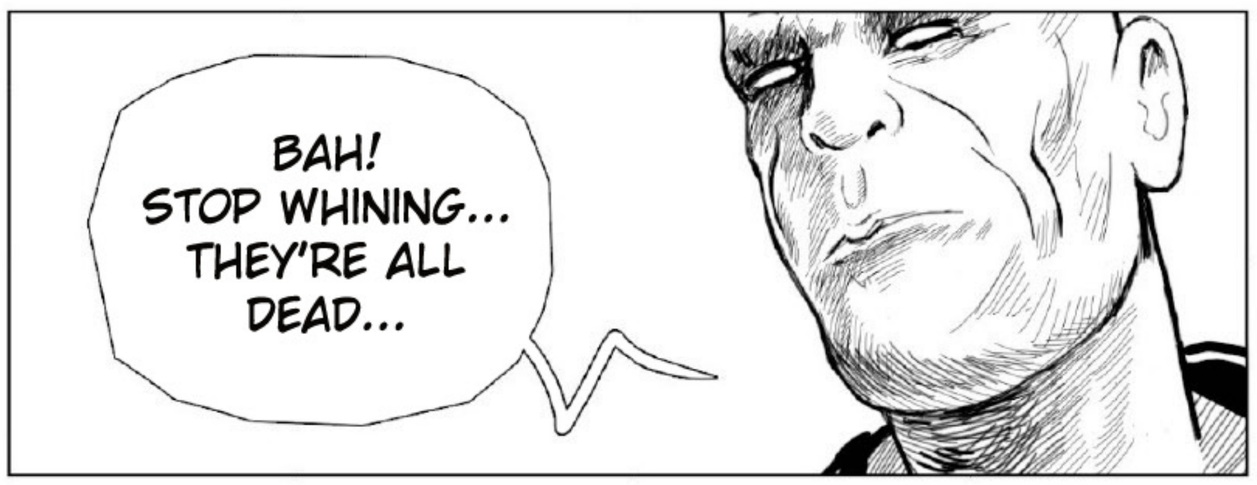
OK!

YEAH...
NOW WE'RE IN THE HEART OF THE ZONE.

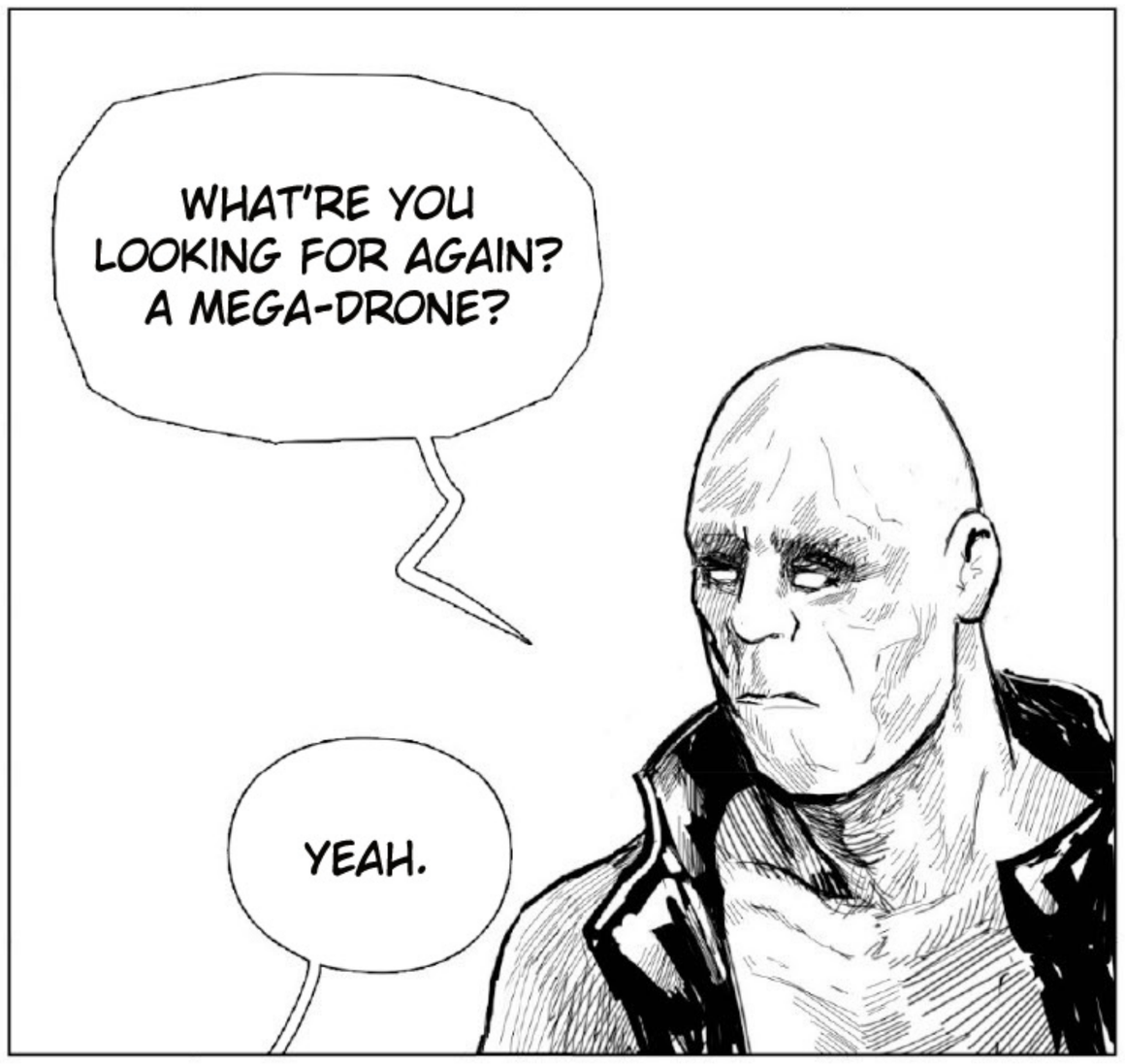


!
KLANG

WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?


BAH! STOP WHINING... THEY'RE ALL DEAD...

PFFF... THIS IS NO FUN...


WHAT'RE YOU LOOKING FOR AGAIN? A MEGA-DRONE?
YEAH.

SO IT WON'T BE HERE...

BUT RIGHT ON THE FRONT-LINES!

WE NEED TO GO THAT WAY.

THERE'S A BIG BATTLE OVER THERE.

WHERE'D THAT COME FROM?

YOU KNOW WHERE WE ARE?

NO. BUT THERE'S LOADS OF SHADOWS OVER IN THAT DIRECTION.

I JUST KNOW, THAT'S ALL! TRUST ME.

COME ON, LET'S GO, I SAID...

GOT A BIT OF A WALK AHEAD OF US...

YOU'RE VERY RESOURCEFUL, LITTLE MAN!

YEAH.

THANKS.

I THINK A CAMPING STOVE SHOULD DO THE TRICK AGAINST A MEGA-DRONE...

JUST GOTTA WHACK IT IN THE HEAD.

THAT'S YOUR GOAL? TAKING DOWN THIS DRONE?

NO, MY GOAL IS A GATE. TAKING DOWN THE DRONE IS THE KEY.

HAVE YOU EVER SEEN A TORANA?

MAYBE. WHAT IS IT?

A PIECE OF SHIT.

A REAL PIECE OF SHIT.

THE KIND OF PIECE OF SHIT THAT TURNS YOUR LIFE UPSIDE DOWN...

... FOREVER...

YOU COULDN'T GET BACK TO THEM? WHY DIDN'T YOU TRY ANOTHER WAY?

I TRIED! FOR DAYS, WEEKS...

IT WAS USELESS.

THERE WAS ALWAYS A TORANA STOPPING ME FROM GETTING THROUGH...

I THOUGHT I'D GONE MAD.

... AND NOW IT'S BEEN FORTY YEARS I'VE BEEN TRYING TO GET THROUGH THEM...

...

YOUR STORY IS A STRANGE ONE, LITTLE MAN.

LUPO. MY NAME IS LUPO.

AND WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

...

ME? DON'T HAVE ONE.

AH...

YOUR EARLIEST MEMORY THEN?

MY EARLIEST MEMORY?

... A MOUNTAIN OF BODIES.

!

BODIES OF CREATURES... ALL KINDS OF CREATURES.

MOST OF THEM DEAD, SOME STILL ALIVE... FIGHTING EACH OTHER, OR EATING THE CORPSES...

YEAH... BODIES AS FAR AS THE EYE COULD SEE.

PILED UP IN HEAPS AND HEAPS.

AMONG ALL THOSE BEASTS, SOME SOON SPOTTED ME... AND ATTACKED.

THINGS YOU COULDN'T EVEN IMAGINE... ALL CLAWS AND TALONS.

I FELT SOMETHING HARD UNDER MY HAND. VERY HARD.

THAT'S MY SECOND MEMORY.

I PICKED IT UP...

AND I STARTED SWINGING.

I SWUNG, AND SWUNG AGAIN...

SWUNG AT EVERYTHING THAT CROSSED MY PATH...

SCRAMBLING UP THE PILED UP CORPSES...

CLIMBING HIGHER AND HIGHER... TOWARDS THE LIGHT I COULD BARELY SEE...

WHEN I THOUGHT I COULDN'T GO ON ANYMORE...

... STAGGERING, AT THE END OF MY STRENGTH...

... VOICES CRIED OUT TO ME, ENCOURAGED ME.

THERE WAS A WHOLE GROUP OF... WARRIORS.

THEY LAUGHED.

THAT IS MY THIRD MEMORY.

WHO WERE THEY... THESE WARRIORS?

I DON'T KNOW REALLY... PEOPLE LIKE ME...

... WHO HAD SURVIVED THE "PIT"...

... THAT'S THE NAME THEY GAVE THAT PLACE.

I CALMLY MOVED TOWARDS THEM. THAT'S WHAT SAVED ME.

NOT EVERYONE WHO MADE IT UP THAT HIGH WAS SO LUCKY...

BRAKA

WHEN WE DIDN'T THINK WE'D GET ANY MORE NEW RECRUITS, WE WENT AND KILLED CZARNS... WE WERE GOOD AT THAT, WE "FAILURES".

FAILURES?

YEAH, SOME SAID THAT WE WERE FAILURES, THAT THAT WAS WHY WE WERE THROWN INTO THE PIT...

WE DIDN'T CARE.

WE WERE HAVING FUN.

THE PIT? A CORPSE DUMP? FAILED EXPERIMENTS?

COULD IT BE...?

I HAVE TO KNOW!

WHERE DID I PUT IT?

HERE! TAKE THIS!

WHAT IS IT?

RHAA

KCHKCHKCHiiKCHiii

POC

POC

I THINK IT'S A WEAPON.

A WEAPON MEANT FOR THOSE OF YOUR... KIND...

... BUT WHICH YOU EVIDENTLY CAN'T USE...

A WEAPON?

MORE LIKE A GADGET!

AH.

CRi

CROUi

CRUNK

NOW THIS, THIS IS A WEAPON!

AND WHAT HAPPENED TO THE FAILURES?

ALL DEAD.

IT'S BEEN AT LEAST... FIVE OR SIX LIGHTS OUTS!

WOOSH

WOOSH

THEY WERE A BUNCH OF BASTARDS... I DON'T REALLY MISS THEM...

BUT EVER SINCE THEN... IT'S BEEN QUIET.

ALL I HAVE LEFT OF THEM IS THESE FEW RAGS... AND MY NAME.

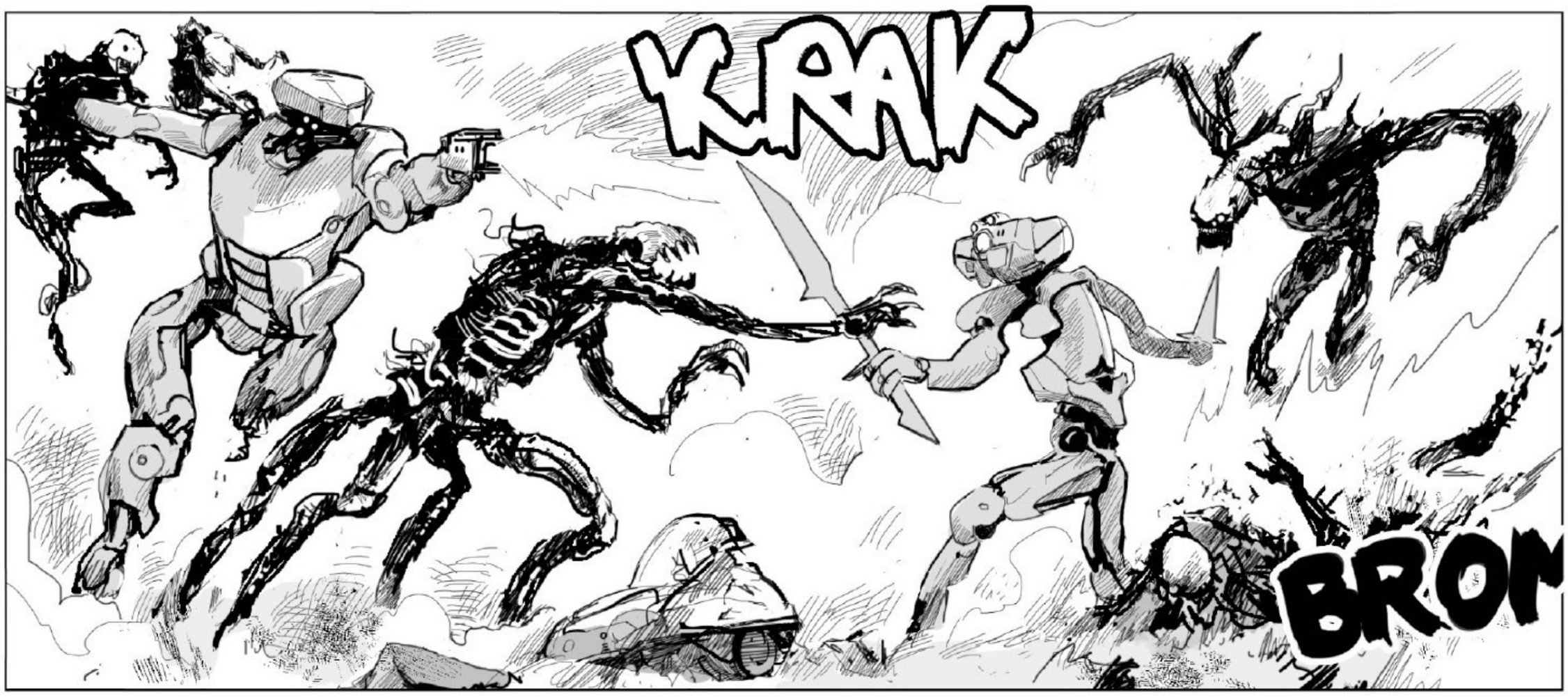
RHYFF.

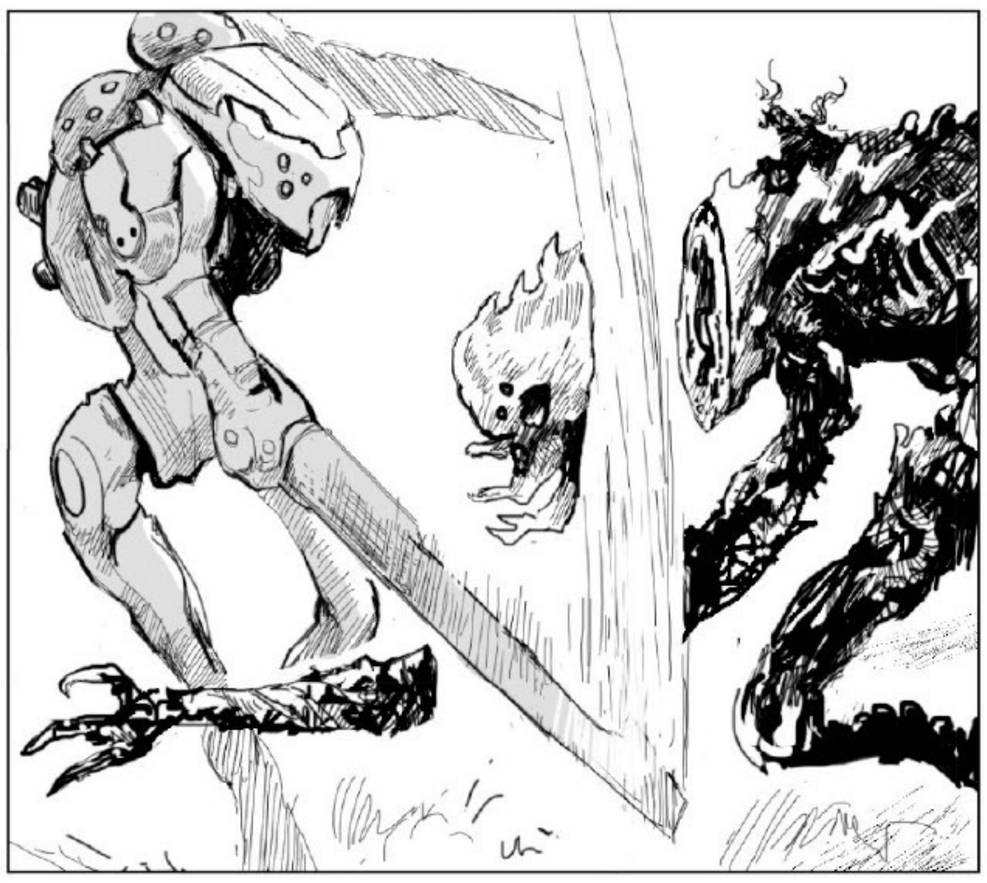
MY NAME IS RHYFF.

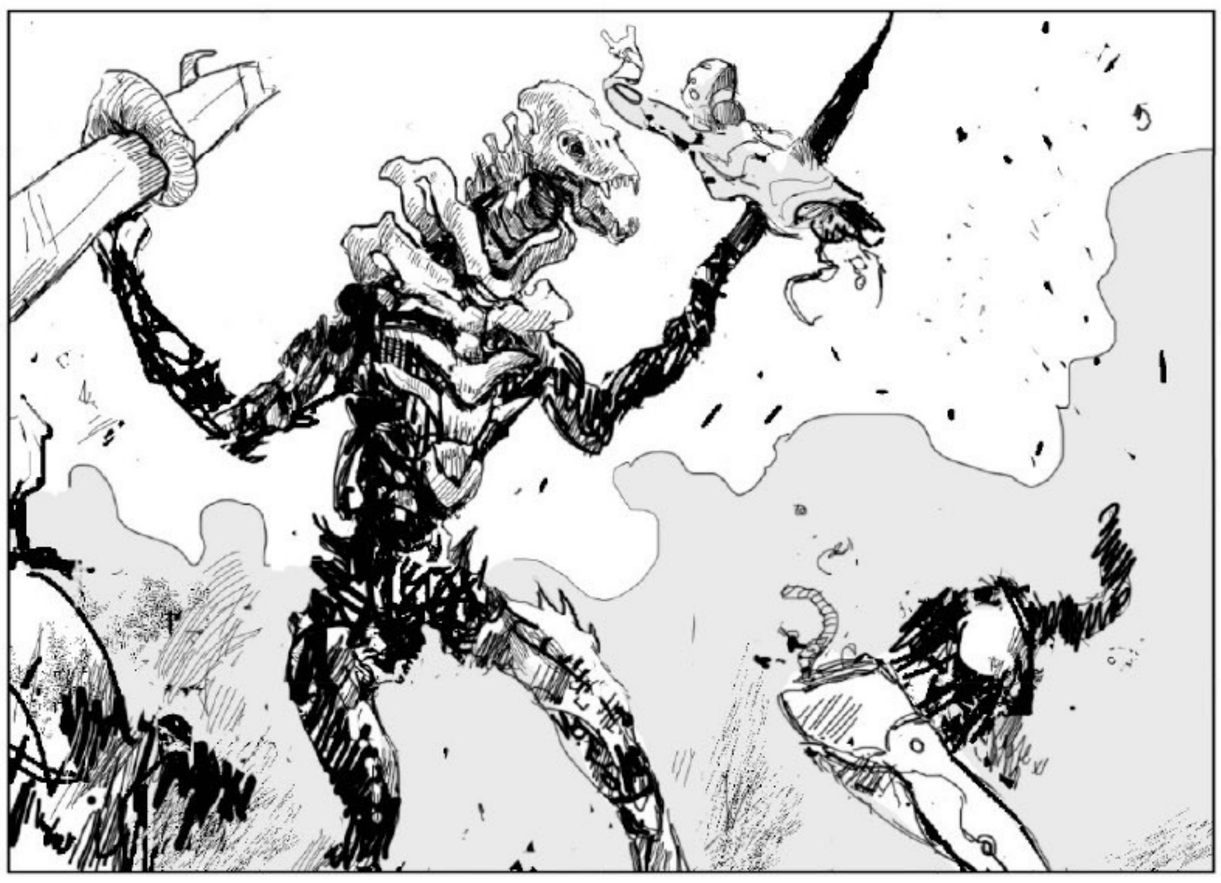
WELL, RHYFF, FOR SOMEONE WHO CLAIMS NOT TO HAVE A STORY...

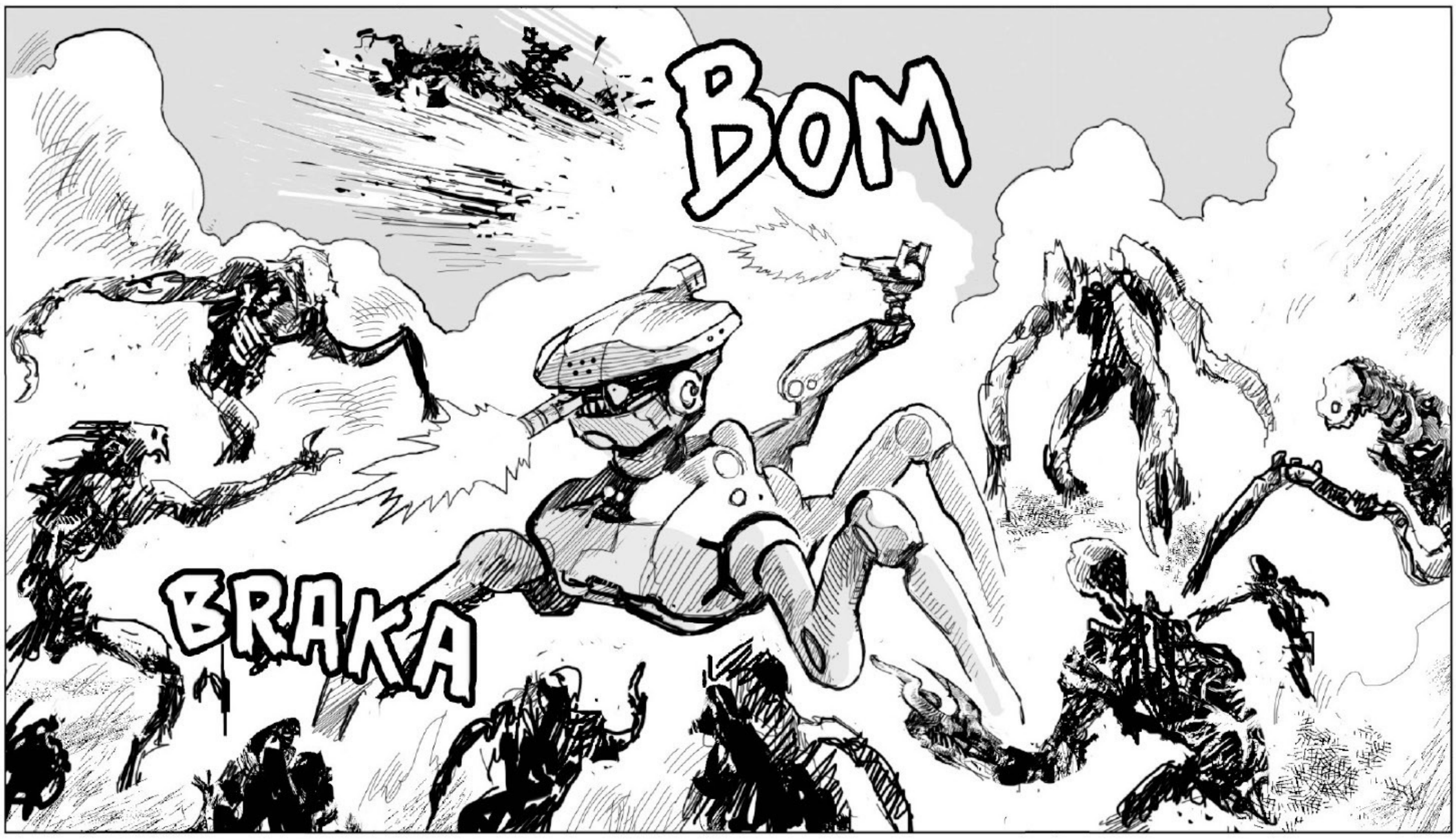
... THAT WAS DAMNED INTERESTING!

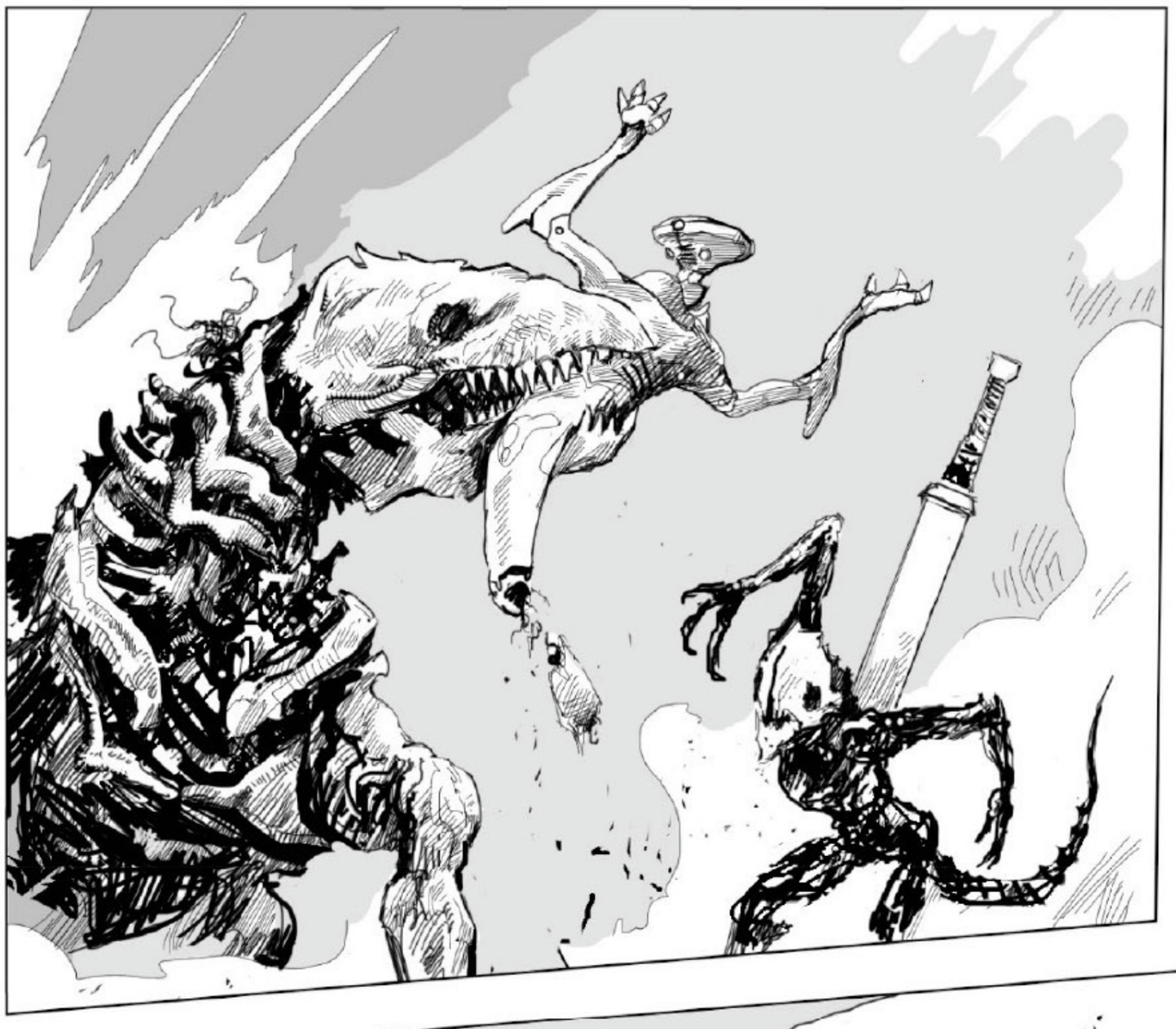
KAPOW
FSHII
BRAKK
BRATATAT
PLEASE DON'T TELL ME YOU WANT TO GET A CLOSER VIEW OF THAT...
BOM
FWIII
KROM
BAAKA
POW
BROM
NO, I CAN SEE FINE FROM HERE...
KREU


KRAAK
BROM






BOM
BRAKA



PROM

HEY, THAT ISN'T YOUR DRONE BY ANY CHANCE?

WHICH ONE?

THE HUGE ONE BEHIND THAT PILLAR.

BROM

BRAKA

YEAH, IT COULD BE...

I DON'T SEE ANY BIGGER THAN THAT...

AND LOOK AT THE DAMAGE TO ITS ARMOUR...

THAT'S OLD DAMAGE...

KAPOW

BRAKA-TAKA

YEAH, IT'S DOING ALRIGHT... ONE SMALL PROBLEM: WHAT CHANCE DO WE HAVE AGAINST IT IF SO MANY CZARNS ARE NO GOOD?

PSHIIII

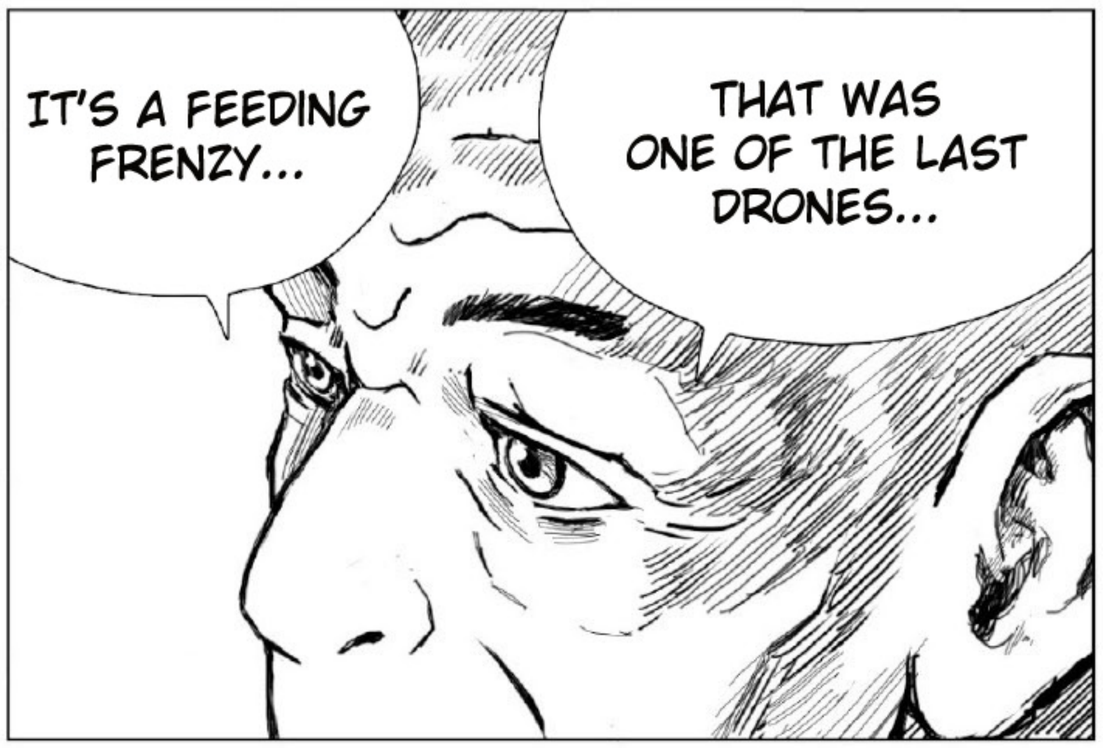
KA-POW

KPOM

VZIIII

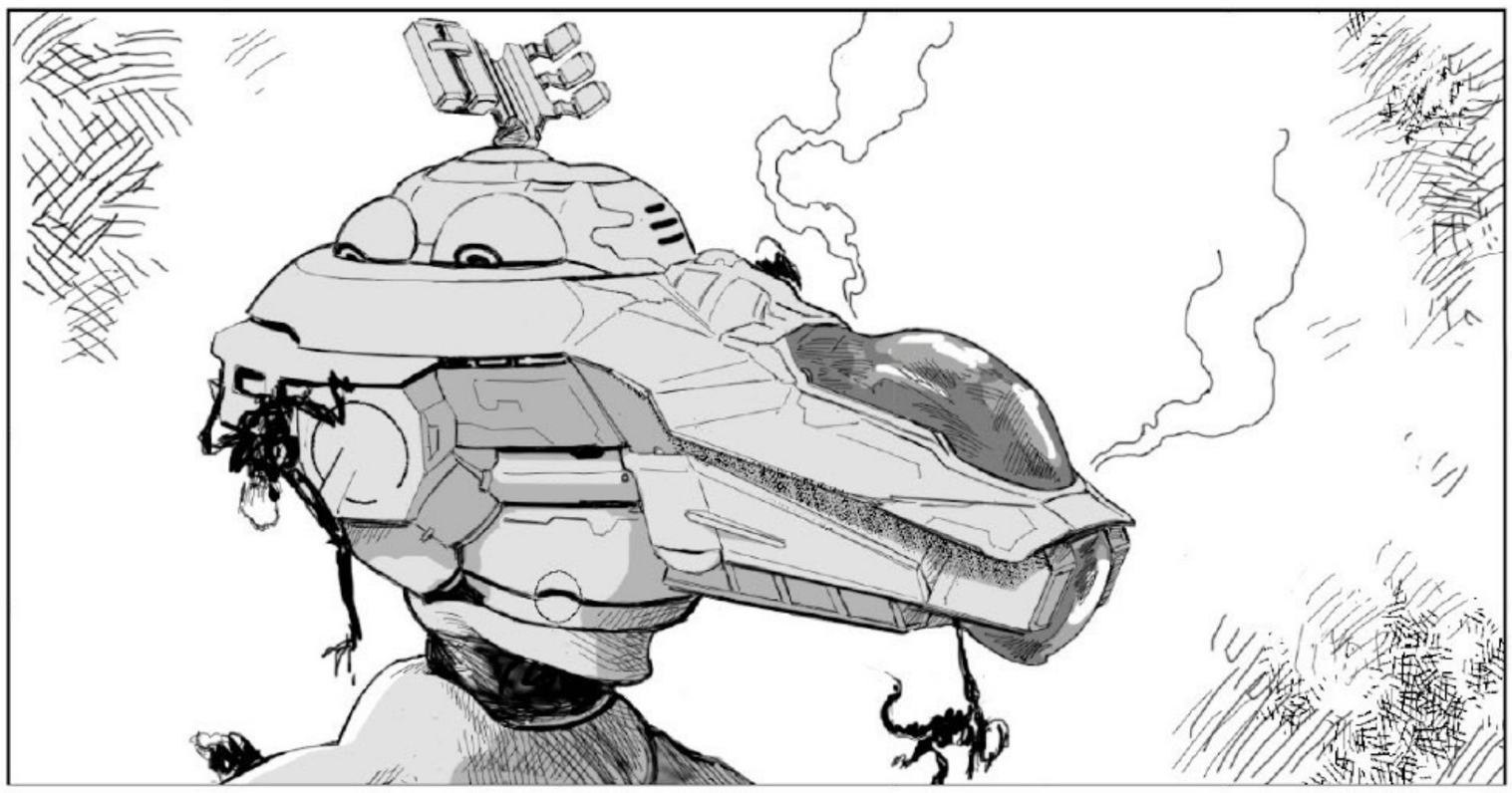
KRACH

YOU WERE SAYING?


IT'S A FEEDING FRENZY...
THAT WAS ONE OF THE LAST DRONES...

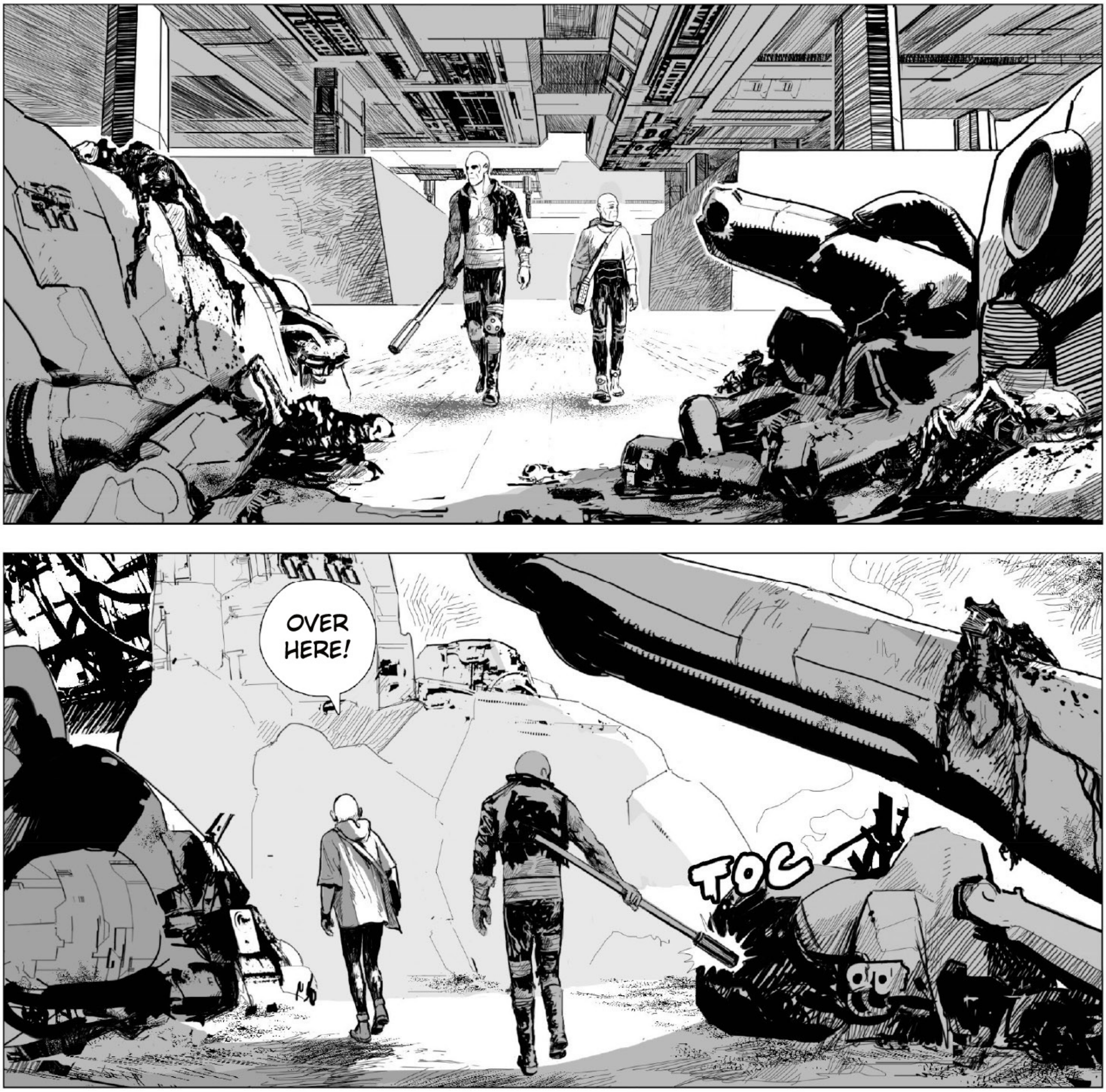
WOOOMMM
CRRRRRRR

BAM!!

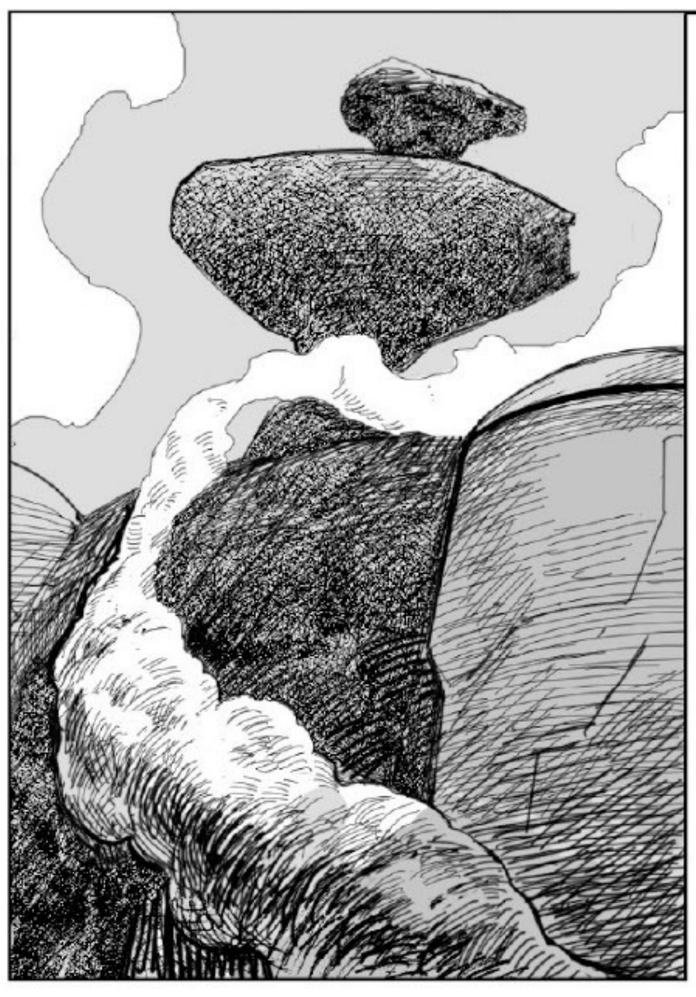


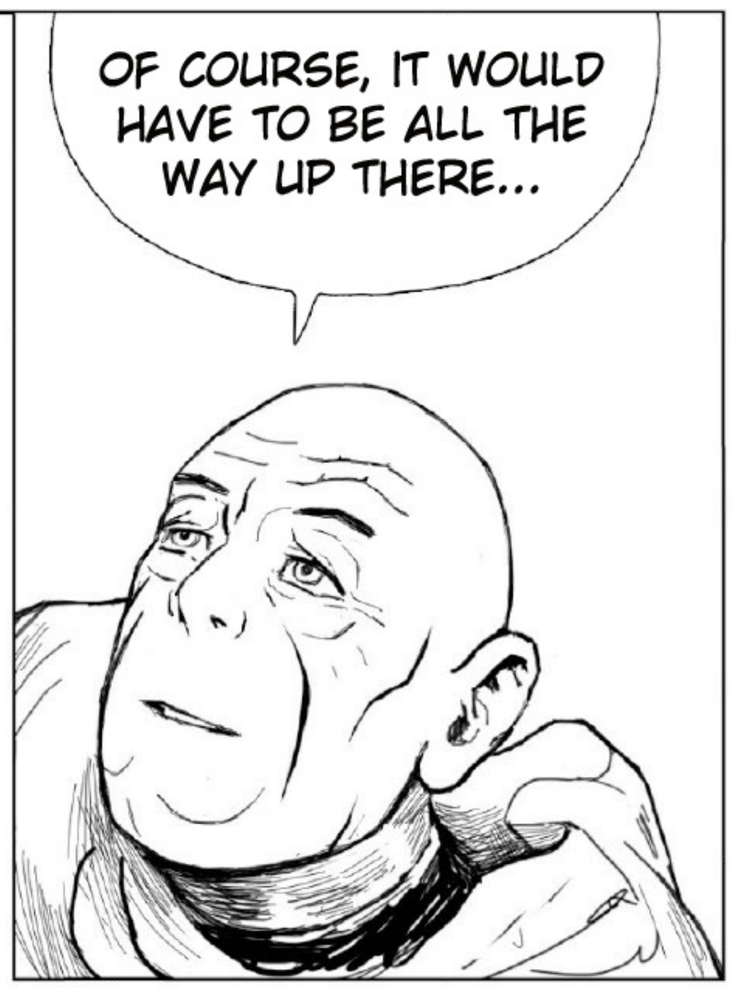
A LITTLE EASY... IT COULD HAVE TAKEN ONE OR TWO MORE DOWN WITH IT...

COME ON RHYFF! THE CZARNS ARE LEAVING! NOW'S OUR CHANCE!


OVER HERE!
TOC

...




OF COURSE, IT WOULD HAVE TO BE ALL THE WAY UP THERE...

UNLESS...

TCHAAC

WARNING... LOW BAT-TERY... WARNING...

IT'S HOLDING...

ALRIGHT, LET'S GO!

FWOOO

JUST A LITTLE MORE!

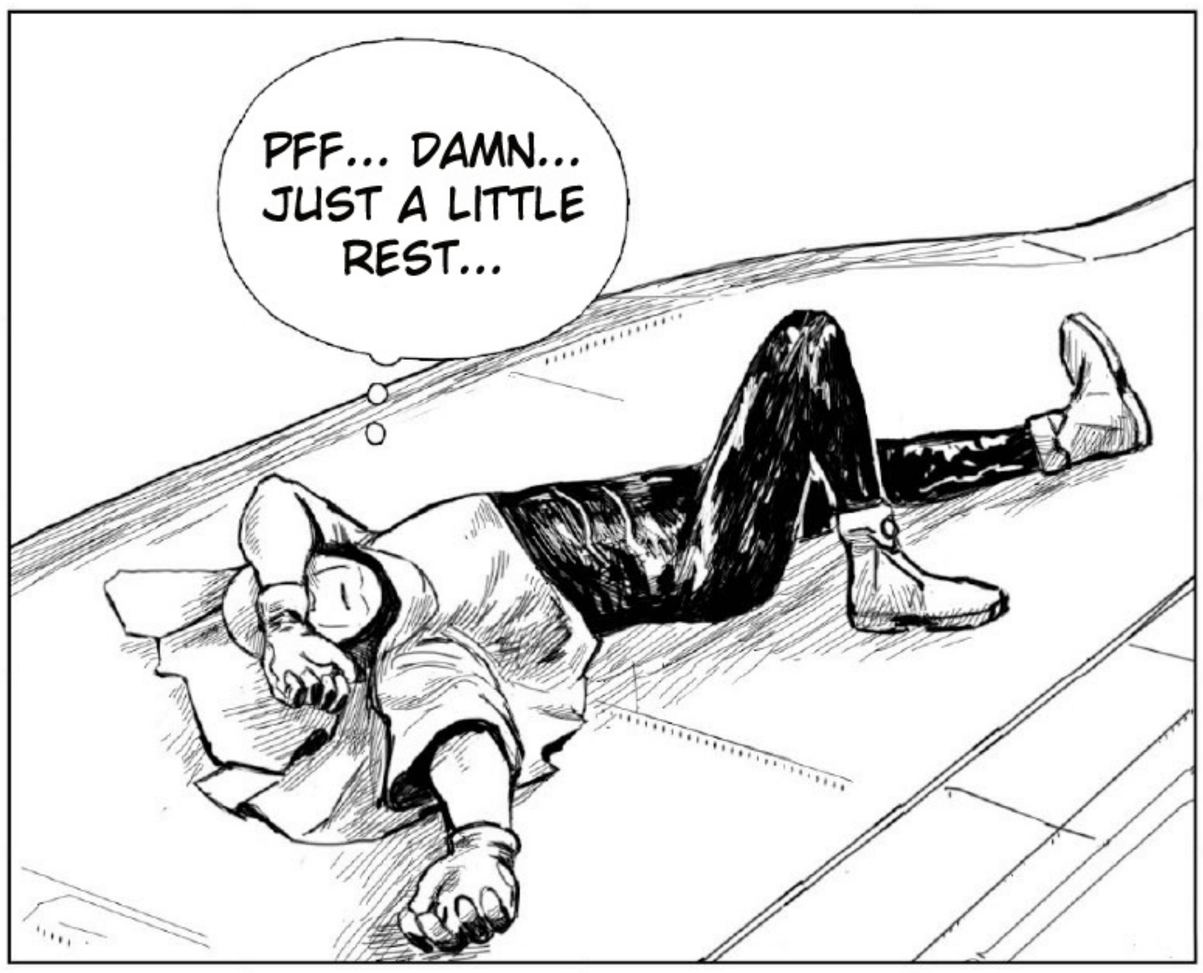
FWOOOOOO

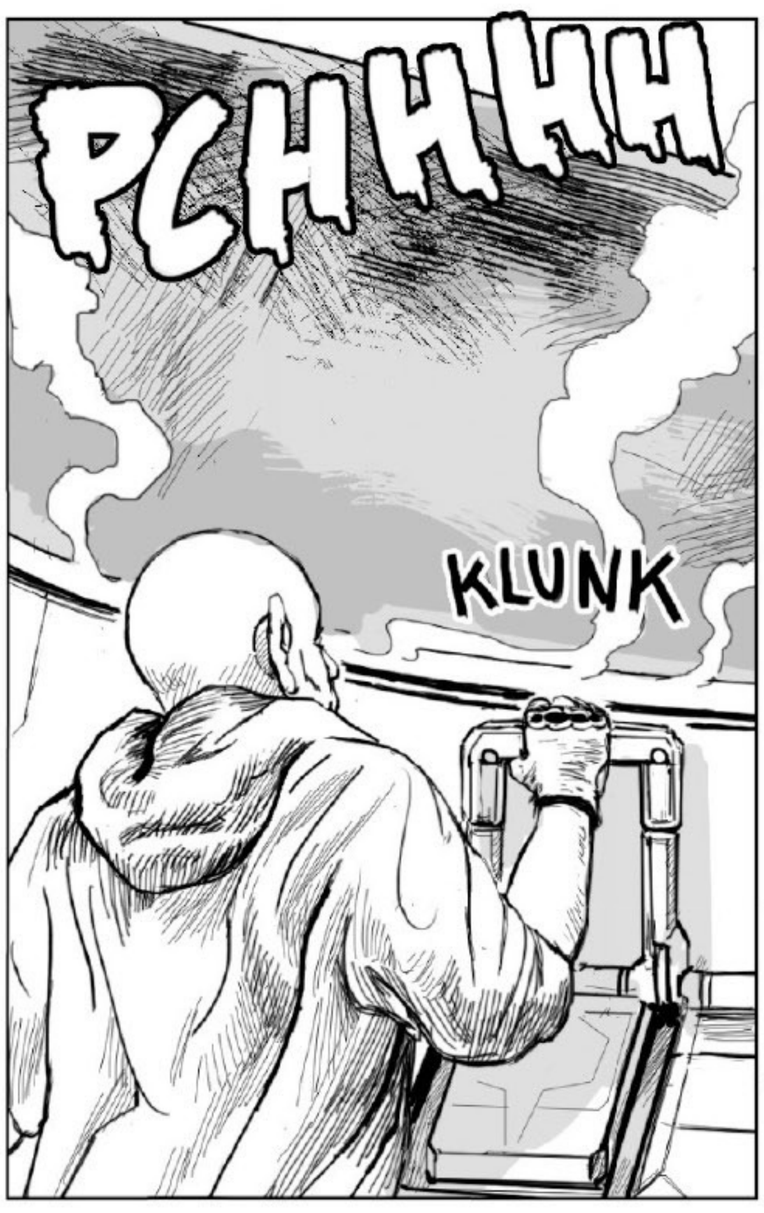
FWOOO-

CLIC

HAN

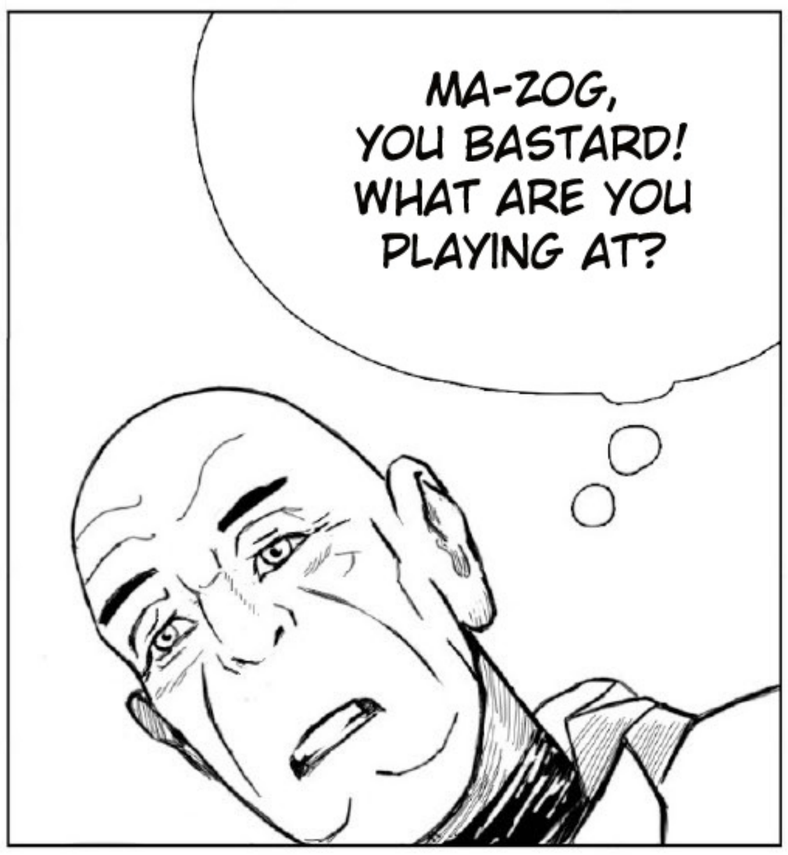
PHEW...
MADE IT...

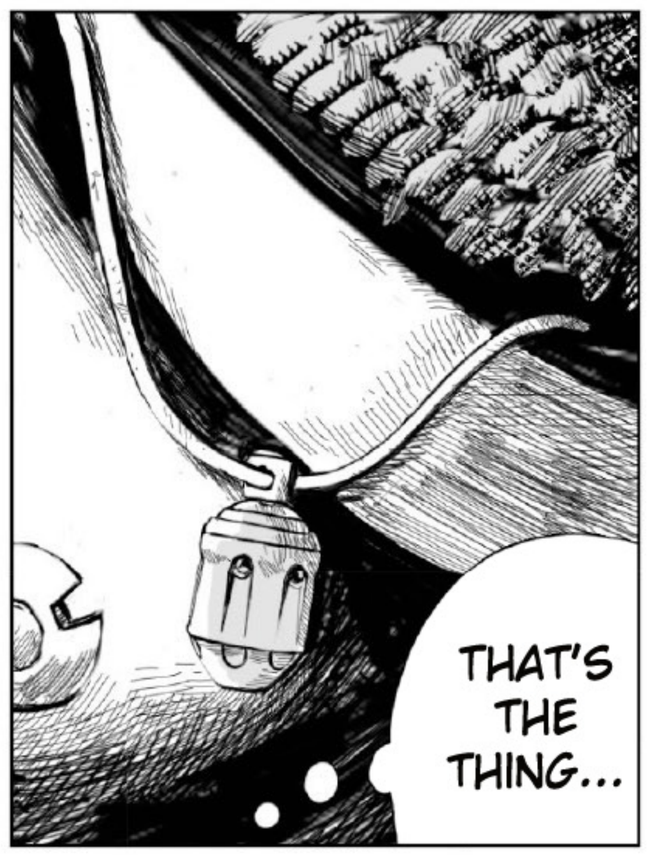

PFF... DAMN...
JUST A LITTLE
REST...

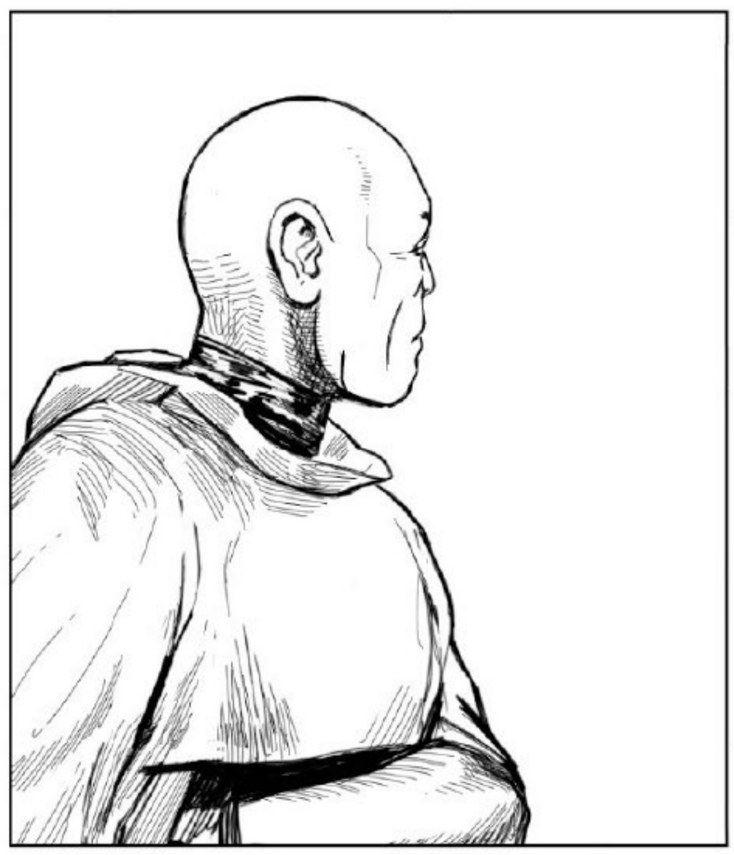

PCHHHH
KLUNK

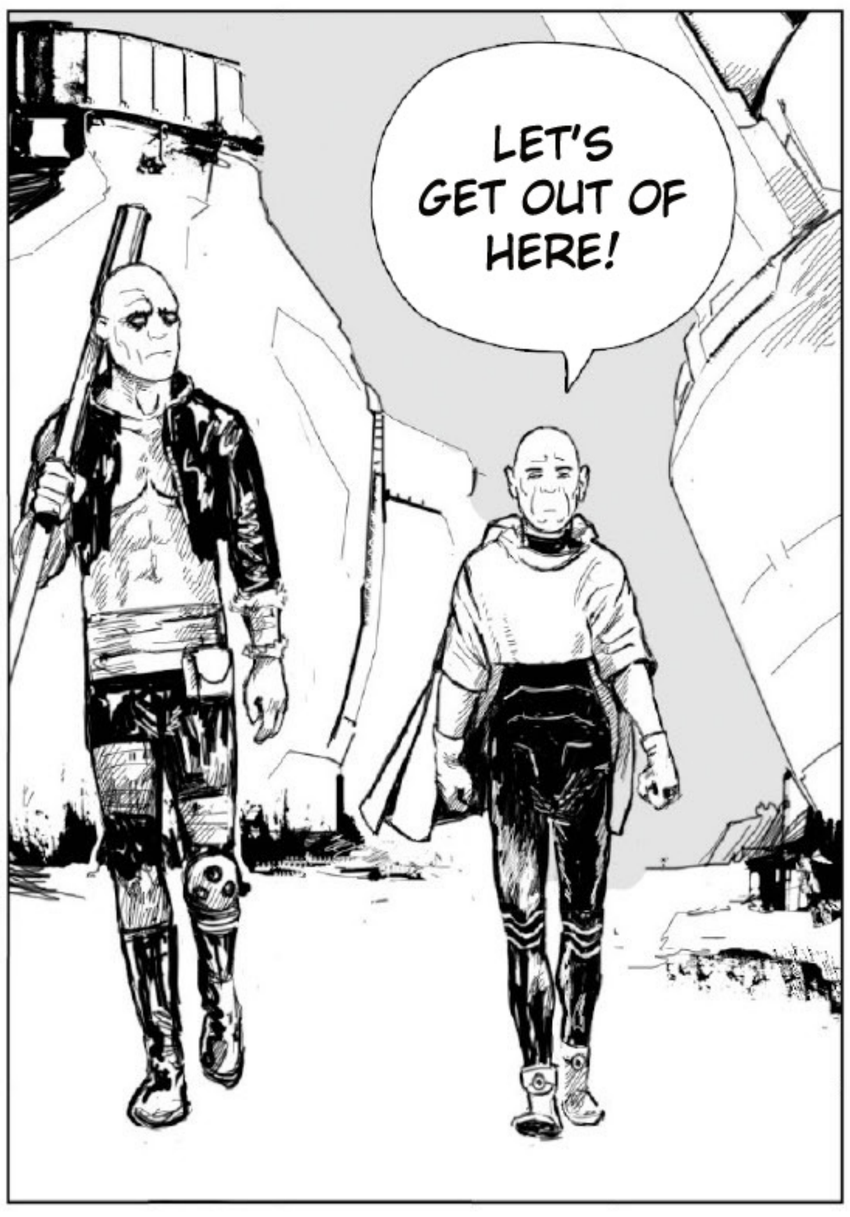
FWUIIIII

!!


MA-ZOG, YOU BASTARD! WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING AT?


THAT'S THE THING...




LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!

NOT MUCH FURTHER TO GO... I RECOGNISE THESE STRUCTURES...

WHAT'S WRONG, RHYFF?

I DON'T KNOW. I NEED TO GO CHECK SOMETHING...

GO DO YOUR THING, I'LL CATCH UP LATER.

232

WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOU DIDN'T FIND IT?

EXPLAIN THAT TO ME...

I... I RAN INTO SOME CZARNS...

I WAS AFRAID... AND...

AFRAID?

YOU WANT TO KNOW FEAR?

DO YOU KNOW WHAT I'M CAPABLE OF?

PAF

TAC

I'D SAY JUST ABOUT ANY DIRTY SHIT, RIGHT?

... YOU...

SURPRISED TO SEE ME? I CAN BELIEVE IT.

HAHAHA!

AND WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO, LITTLE LUPO?

BUT I WARNED YOU NOT TO PULL ANYTHING.

YOU'RE JUST AN OLD MAN! YOUR BODY IS WEAK!

TAKE A LOOK AT YOURSELF! EVEN AS I AM, I'M MORE THAN A MATCH FOR YOU!

YOU'VE GOT A BIG MOUTH, MA-ZOG. D'YOU KNOW THAT?

...

ALRIGHT, SWEET LUPO, I CAN SEE I WAS WRONG... WRONG NOT TO BELIEVE IN YOU!

YOU REALLY ARE VERY RESOURCEFUL...

YES...
SO I'VE BEEN TOLD.

BUT FLATTERY WON'T GET YOU ANYWHERE THIS TIME...

I REALLY WANT TO PULL THIS TRIGGER...

HMMM...
IT'S NOT A VERY HIGH CALIBRE GUN...

AND I HAVE PRETTY THICK SKIN...
ARE YOU SURE IT'LL WORK?

BELIEVE ME. I KNOW THIS CALIBRE WILL GO RIGHT THROUGH YOUR SKULL.

LIKE IT DID YOUR COLLEAGUE... THE DRONE PILOT.

...

ALRIGHT, YOU'RE ANGRY AND I CAN UNDERSTAND THAT...

BUT THINK! IF YOU KILL ME, YOU'LL HAVE DONE ALL THAT FOR NOTHING!

DO YOU STILL WANT TO GET THROUGH THAT TORANA?

THERE AREN'T MANY IN THIS PLACE THAT CAN HELP YOU...

YOU'RE RIGHT.

YOU'RE GOING TO OPEN THAT DOOR FOR ME. RIGHT NOW!

COME ON, WE'RE GOING!

WZI WZI WZI

YOU DON'T HAVE THAT FUNNY GADGET ANYMORE?

THE ONE YOU PROMISED ME?

NO, AND YOU KNOW VERY WELL WHY NOT!

DON'T PUSH YOUR LUCK, MA-ZOG...

HERE WE ARE!

XX

...

HEHEHE, I LOVE THAT FEELING! DON'T YOU, LUPO?

OH, OF COURSE, YOU DON'T KNOW IT!

BUT... HOW?

IT'S THANKS TO THAT COMPONENT, ISN'T IT?

YOU DIDN'T TELL ME MUCH ABOUT YOUR MISSION, LUPO...

FOR EXAMPLE: WAS IT YOU WHO KILLED THE DRONE PILOT?

NO. HE KILLED HIMSELF...

I TOOK THE COMPONENT FROM HIS BODY.

DID YOU KNOW HIM WELL?

YES. HIS NAME WOULD BE INCOMPREHENSIBLE TO YOUR EARS...

... IF I SPOKE IT IN OUR NATIVE TONGUE...

I'M SORRY.

!?

DON'T BE.

HE WAS AN IDIOT WHO MADE THE WRONG CHOICE.

HE CHOSE TO FIGHT...

... INSTEAD OF STAYING WITH ME...

HE WAS AN IDEALIST, LIKE YOU, LUPO!

I HATE YOUR KIND!

I DIDN'T EXPECT MUCH FROM YOU, BUT THIS "COMPONENT"...

... YOU NEVER WOULD HAVE GOT IT IF HE WERE ALIVE!

AND THAT'S ALL THAT MATTERED TO ME!

YOU JUST WANTED ME TO KILL HIM...

...

... OR TO BRING BACK PROOF OF HIS DEATH...

YOU BASTARD! YOU WERE PREPARED TO SACRIFICE MY LIFE...

... JUST FOR PROOF THAT YOUR COLLEAGUE WAS DEAD?

HAHAHA!

THAT MAKES YOU LAUGH?

YES! YOU STILL HAVEN'T UNDERSTOOD, SWEET LUPO!

THAT WASN'T MY "COLLEAGUE"...

HE WAS MY PARTNER!

YES, I AM A FEMALE!

YOU SEEM TRULY SURPRISED! WHY?

WHEN SOMEONE BEHAVES LIKE A BASTARD, YOU THINK THEY MUST BE MALE?

ANYWAY... THANKS TO YOU, AT LEAST I KNOW HE'S DEAD...

BUT THAT'S NOT EVEN THE MOST IMPORTANT THING...

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

YOU HAVE OPENED MY EYES, LUPO...

WHEN THE CONTAMINATION STARTED...

I THOUGHT EVERYTHING IN THIS SHIP WAS FUCKED...

THAT WE HAD BEEN LEFT TO OUR OWN DEVICES...

SUDDENLY, I HAD AMBITIONS...

WITH MY KNOWLEDGE, IT WASN'T HARD TO BECOME THE LEADER OF A BAND OF LOST SOULS...

AND I ENJOYED IT... I'VE BEEN THEIR KING FOR ALL THIS TIME...

WELL, THEIR QUEEN...

THEN YOU CAME...

... AND YOU WERE SO DETERMINED.

YOU MADE ME QUESTION MYSELF, LUPO...

AND WHEN I SAW YOU COMING BACK FROM THE DARK ZONE...

I KNEW.

YOU CONVINCED ME, LUPO: THE OEDS ARE STILL HERE.

AND IF THEY STILL WANT ME...

... I'D BE HAPPY TO SERVE THEM AGAIN...

DON'T MAKE ANOTHER MOVE!

I CAN SHOOT BEFORE YOU'RE THROUGH THE DOOR!

THROW ME THE COMPONENT.

HEHEHE!

YOU KNOW WHAT IT IS?

THOSE ARE MY EGGS.

HE TOOK THEM WITH HIM, THE SENTIMENTAL OLD FOOL...

AH! ONE LAST THING, LITTLE LUPO...

ANYONE CAN GO THROUGH THE TORANAS... THERE'S NO NEED FOR ANY SPECIAL COMPONENT.

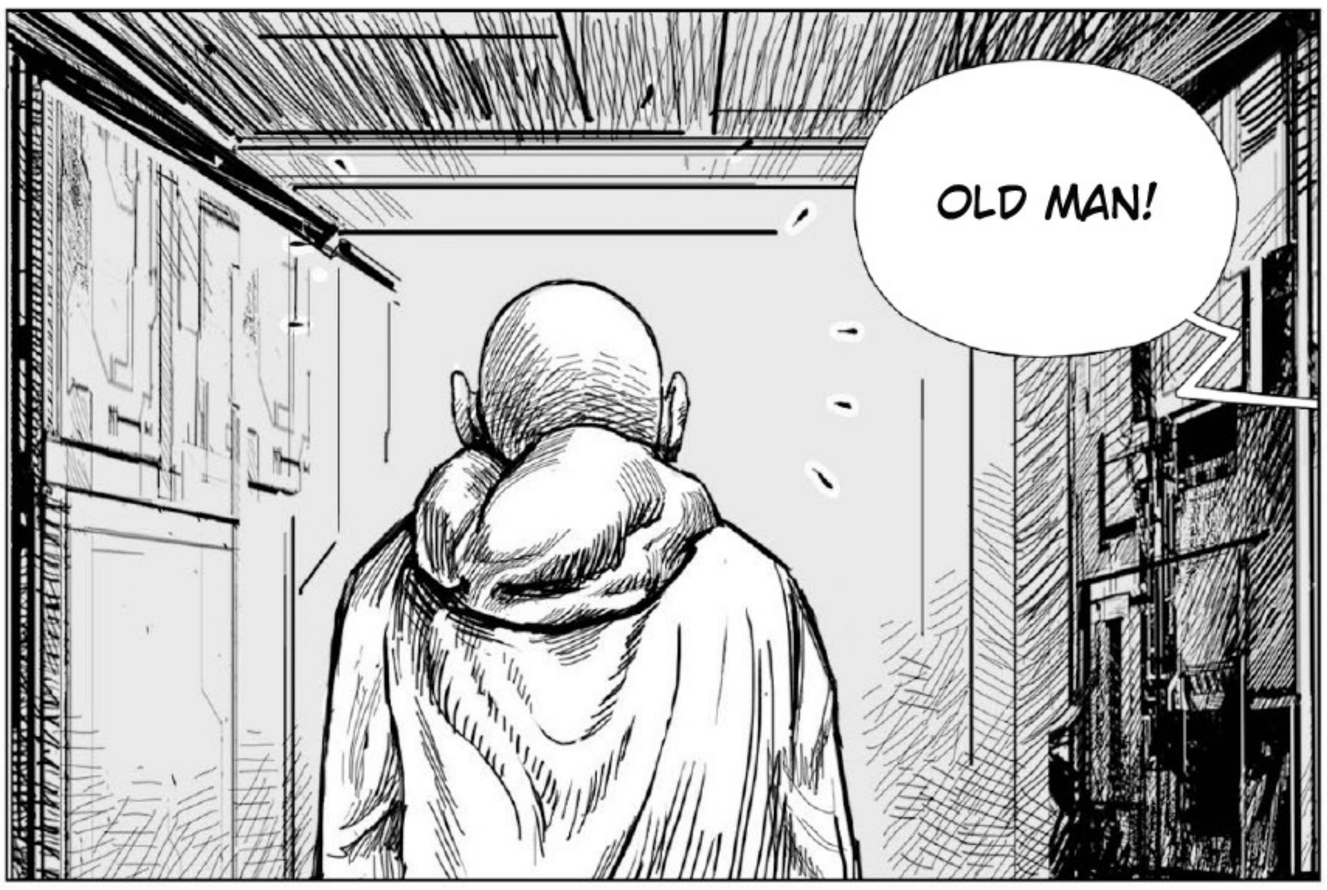
...

BAM

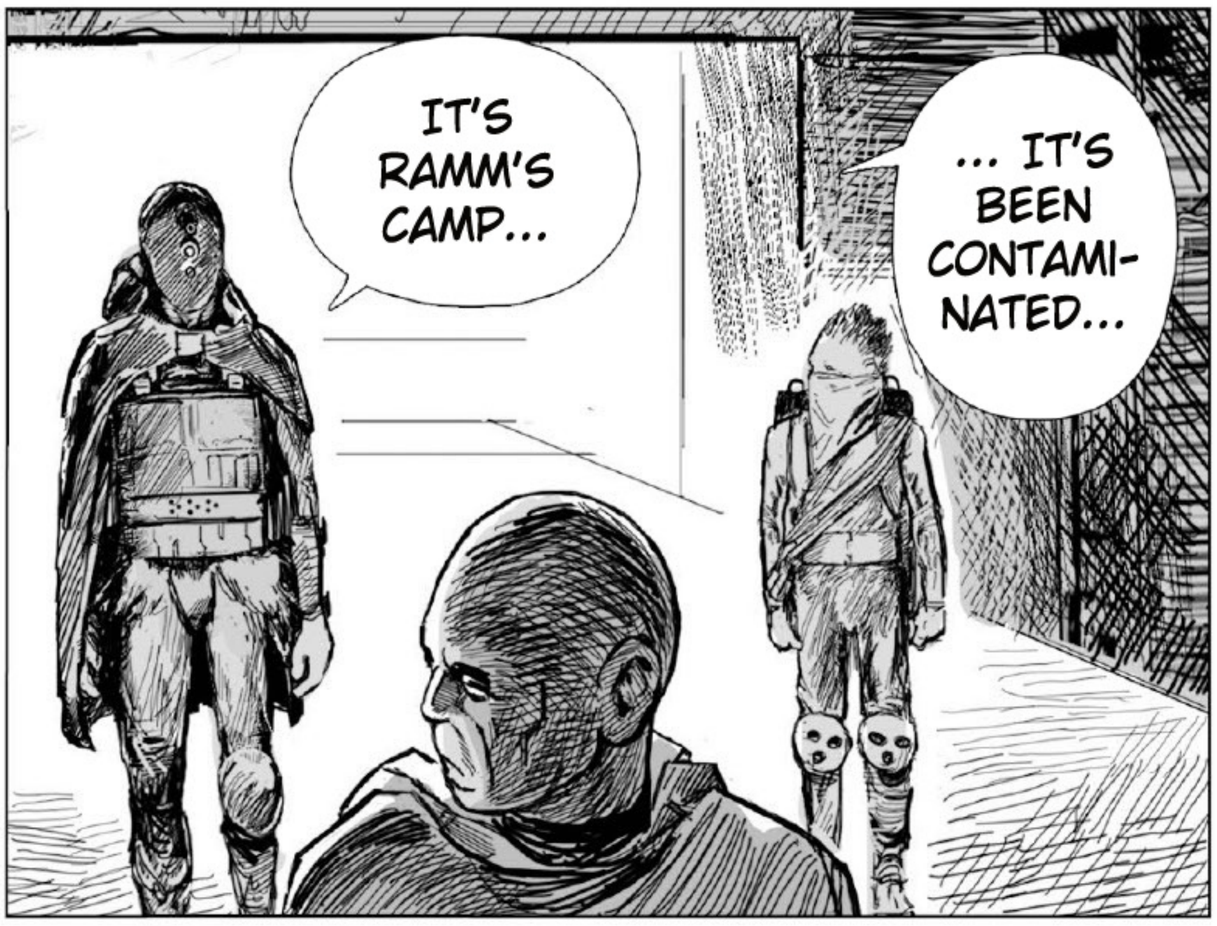
MAIS OUVRE-TOI PUTAIN DE PORTE

OPEN IT...

*OPEN THIS FUCKING DOOR RIGHT NOW


OLD MAN!

WHAT NOW?


IT'S RAMM'S CAMP...
... IT'S BEEN CONTAMI-NATED...

... ANY SURVIVORS?

NO.

DON'T THINK SO.

WHAT ABOUT DEEKA? DON'T TELL ME...

NO, NO, DON'T WORRY, OLD MAN!

DEEKA IS WELL.

BUT SHE DIDN'T WANT TO COME...

SHE'S SCARED OF YOU...

AND YOU, SHEB?

ARE YOU SCARED OF ME?

...

I DON'T HAVE ANY REASON TO BE AFRAID OF YOU!

THEY SAY YOU CHANGED EVERYTHING HERE...

... BUT I THINK YOU'RE NO GOOD.

MA-ZOG?

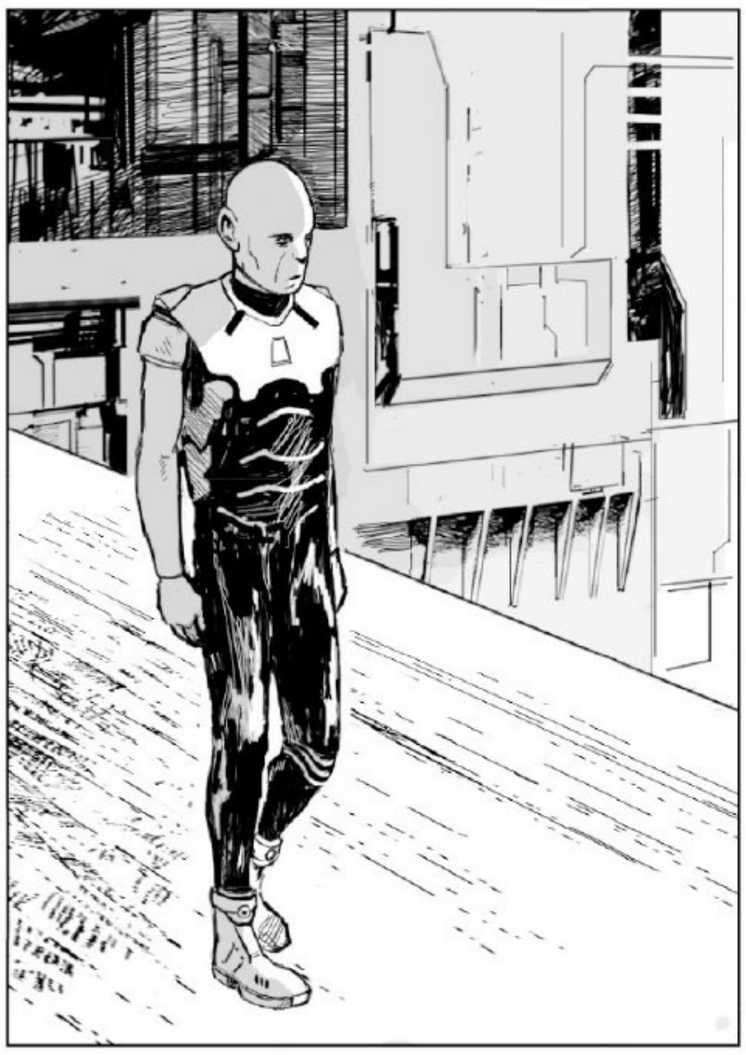
YOU WON'T SEE HIM AGAIN...

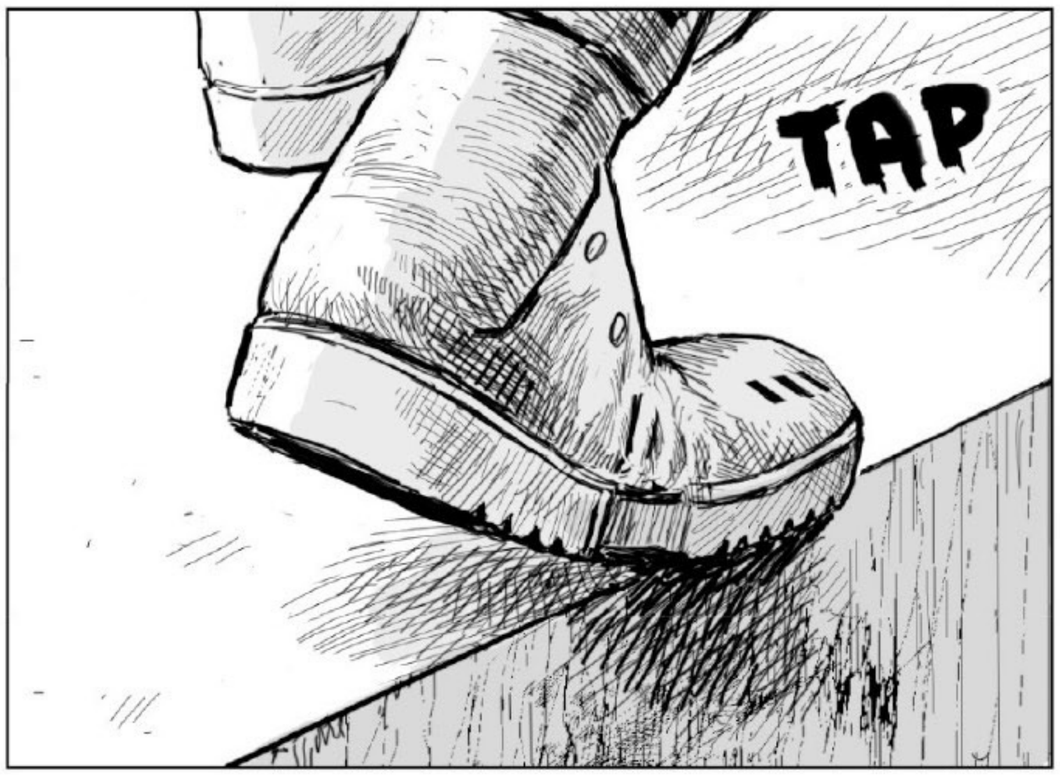
HER.

HE WAS HORRIBLE, THAT OLD PRUNE... BUT WHO'LL MAKE OUR GIZMOS WORK NOW?

I HOPE I NEVER SEE YOU AGAIN OLD MAN...

MA-ZOG IS GONE BECAUSE OF YOU.

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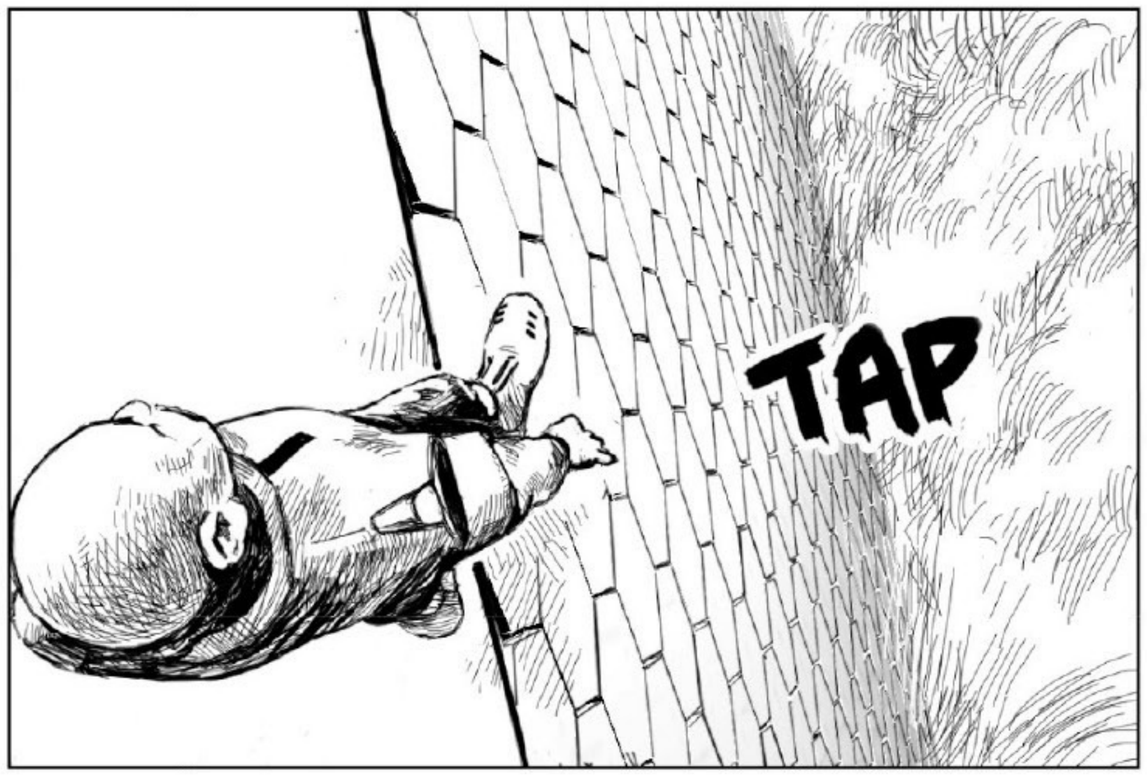
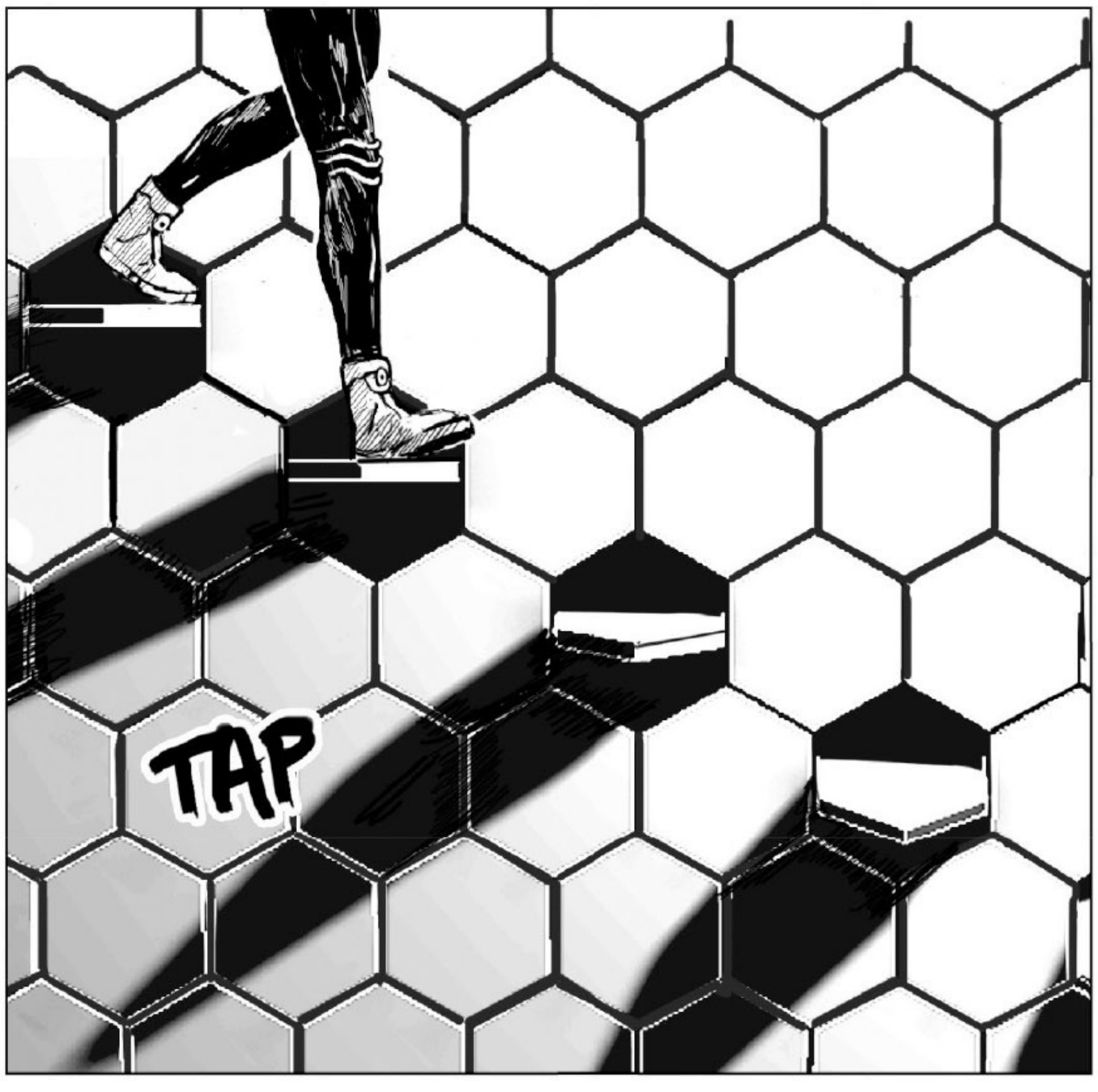

TAP

TAP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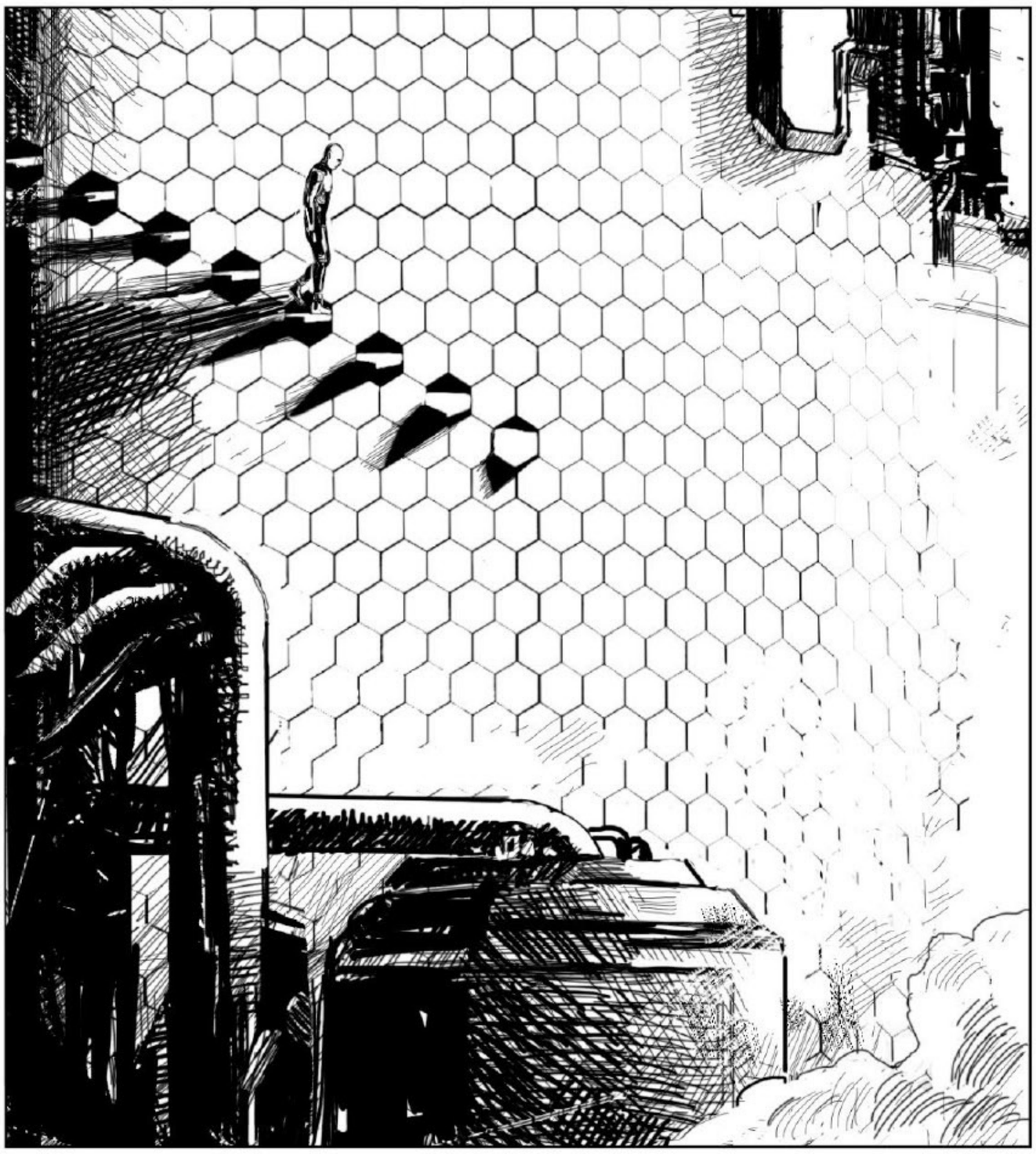
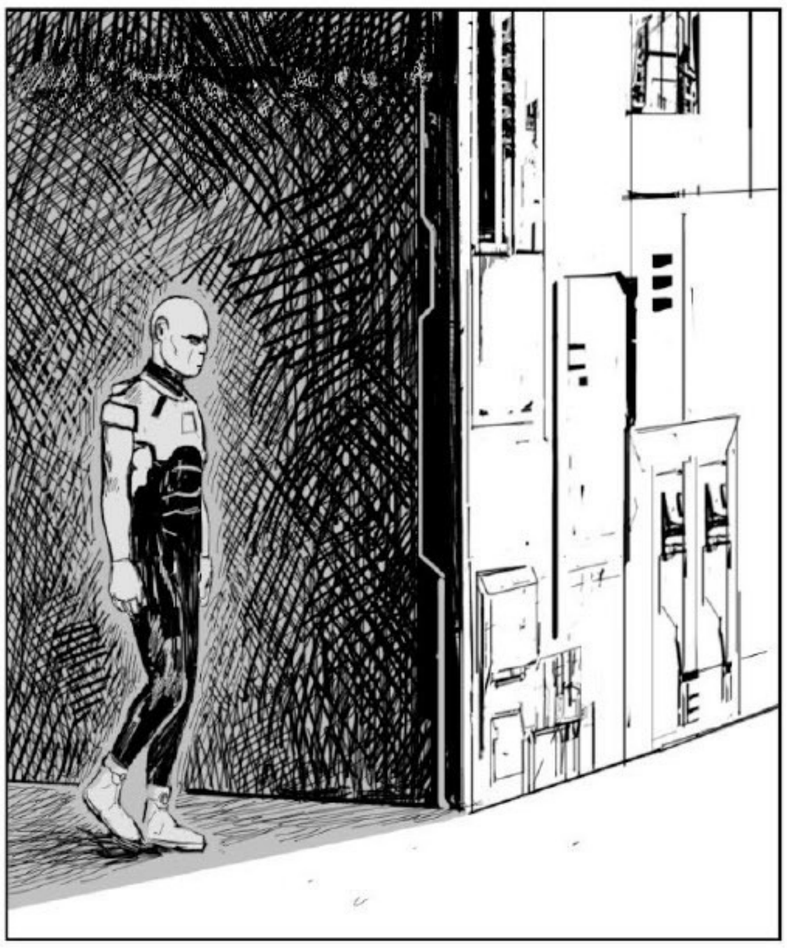
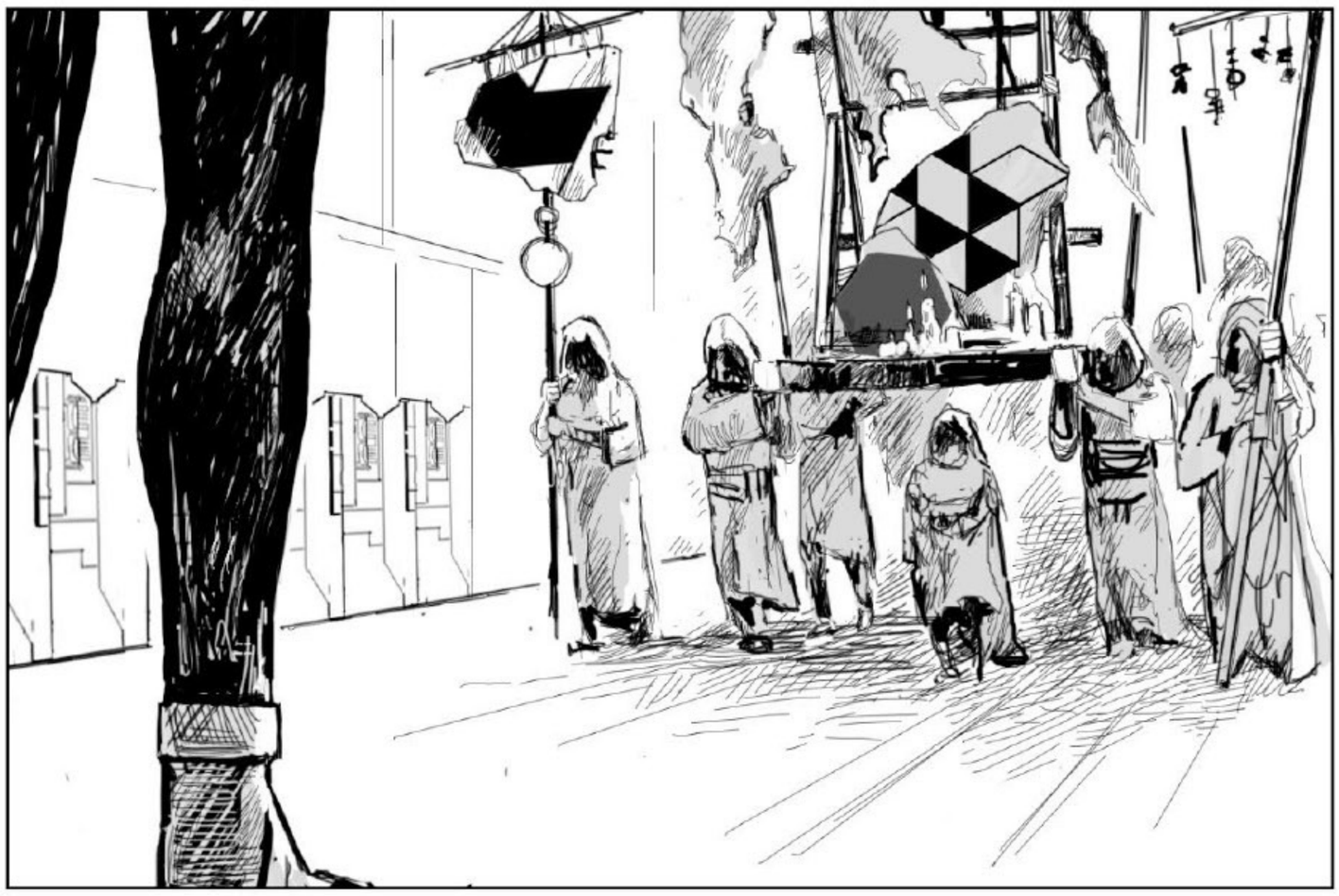
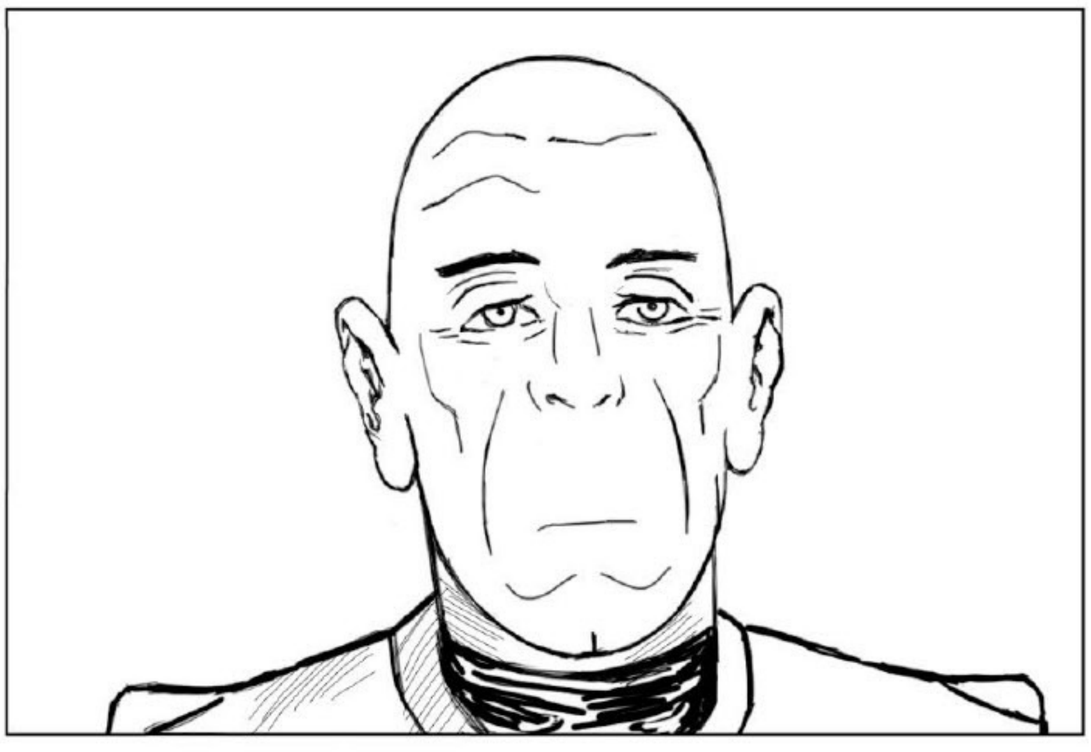
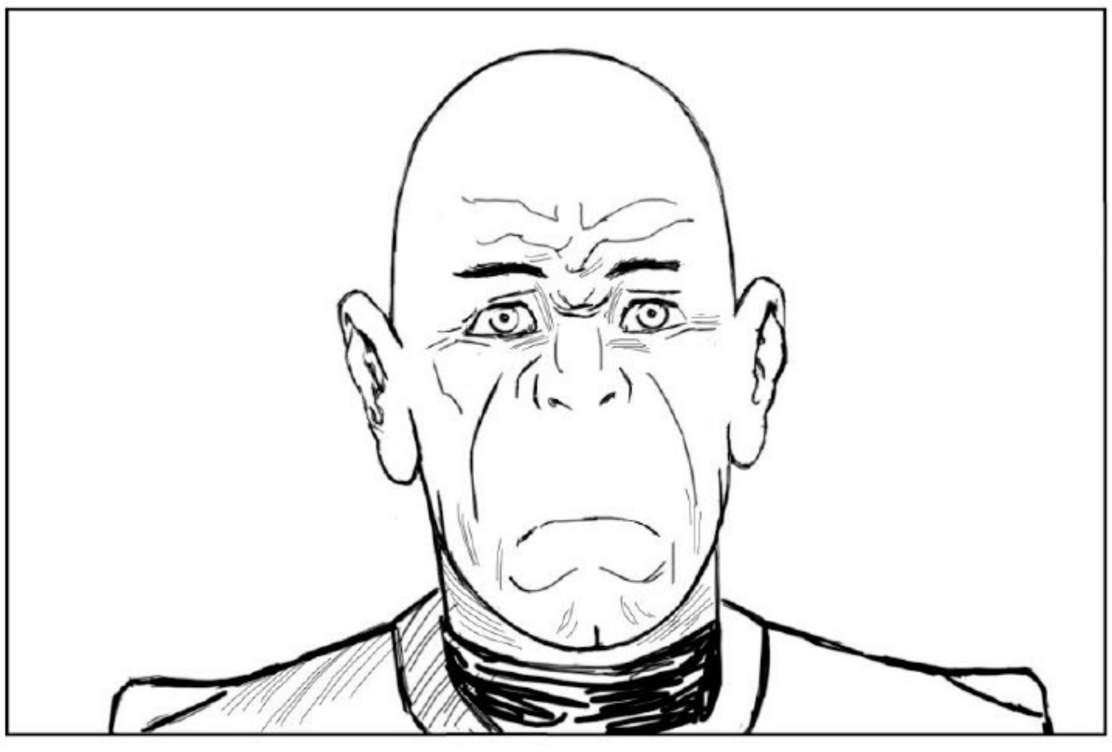
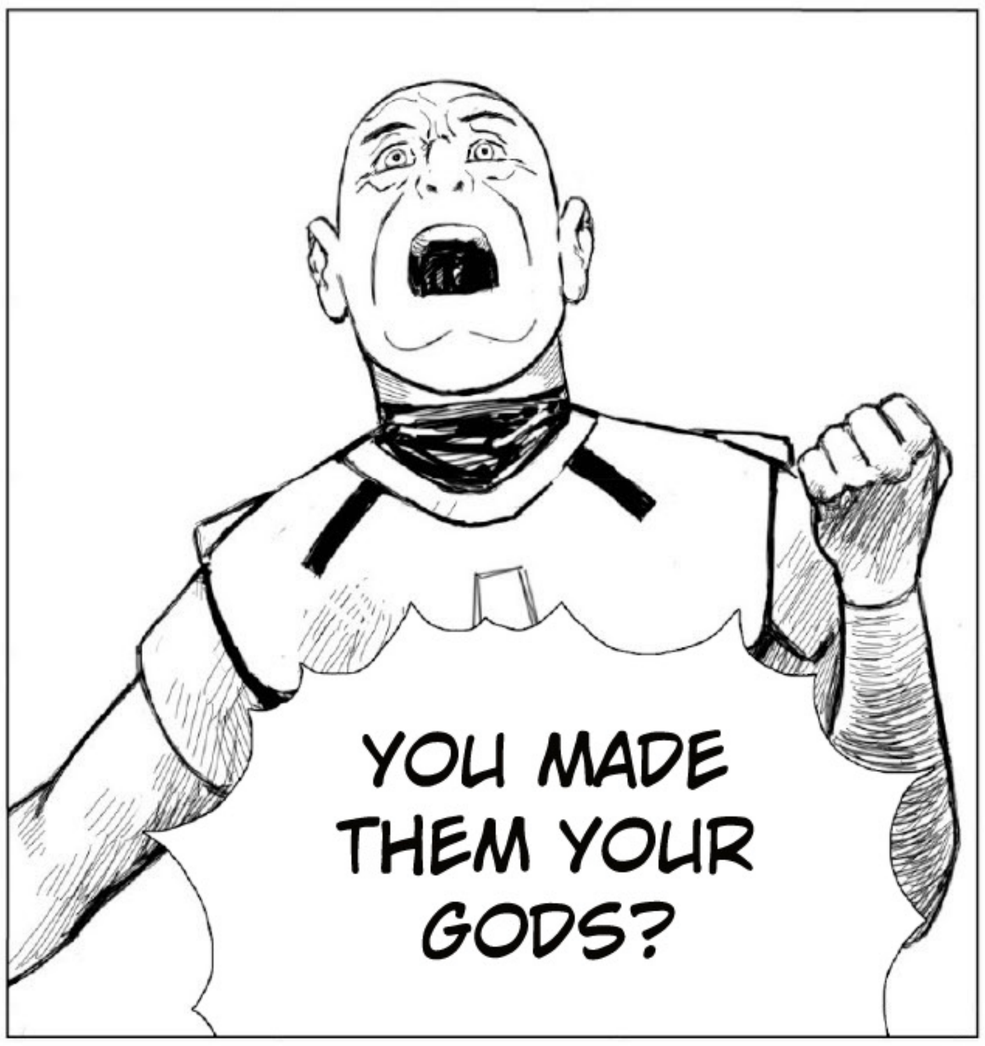








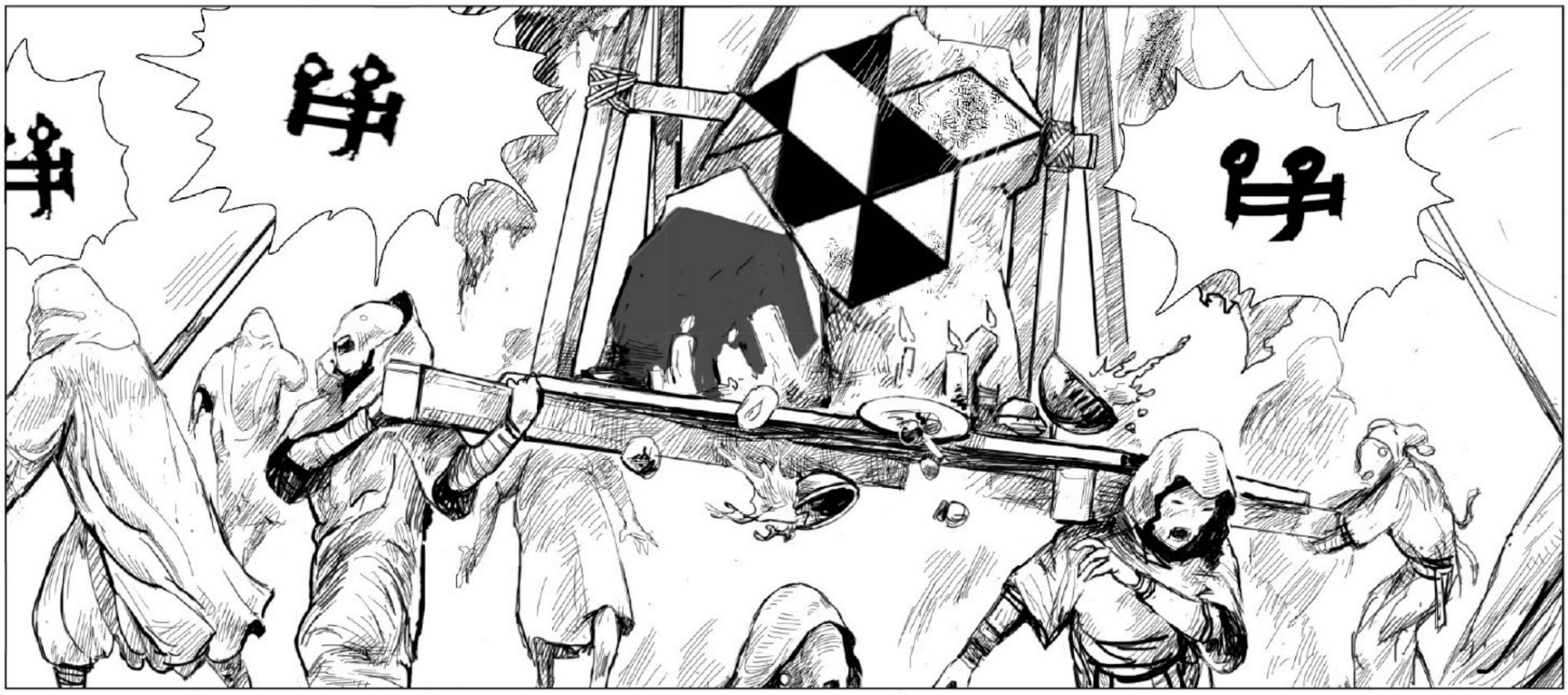


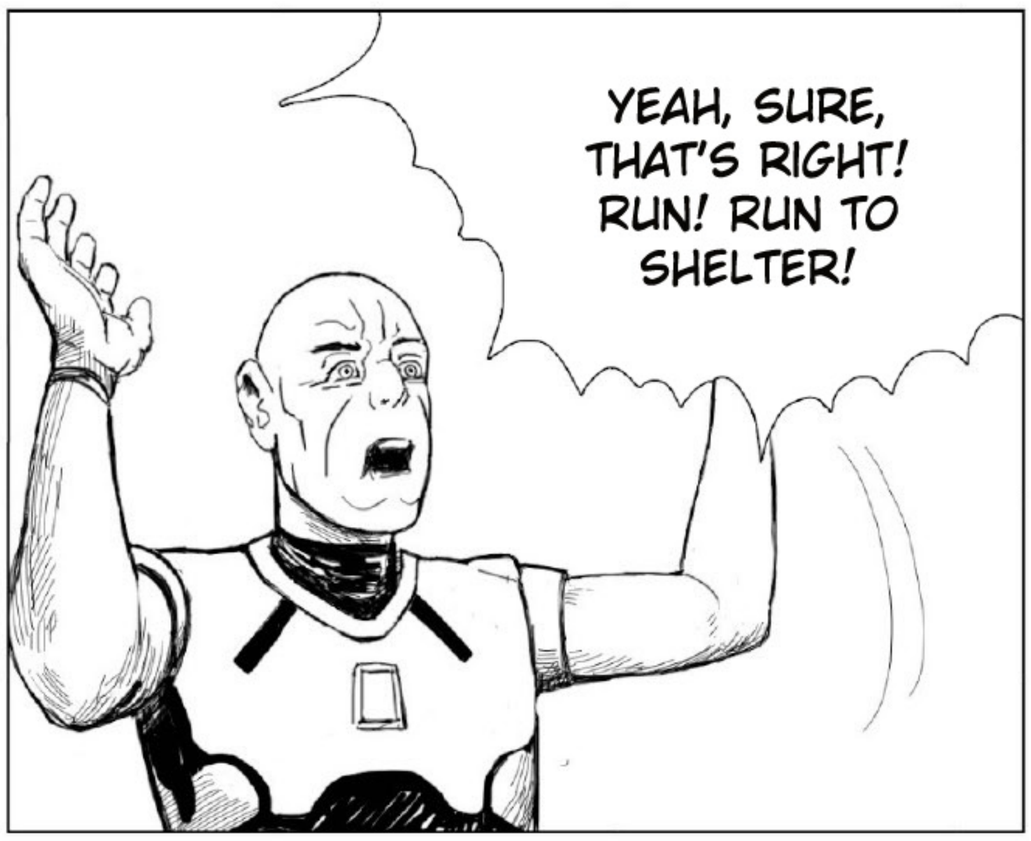

YOU MADE THEM YOUR GODS?

YOU MADE THEM YOUR FUCKING GODS?

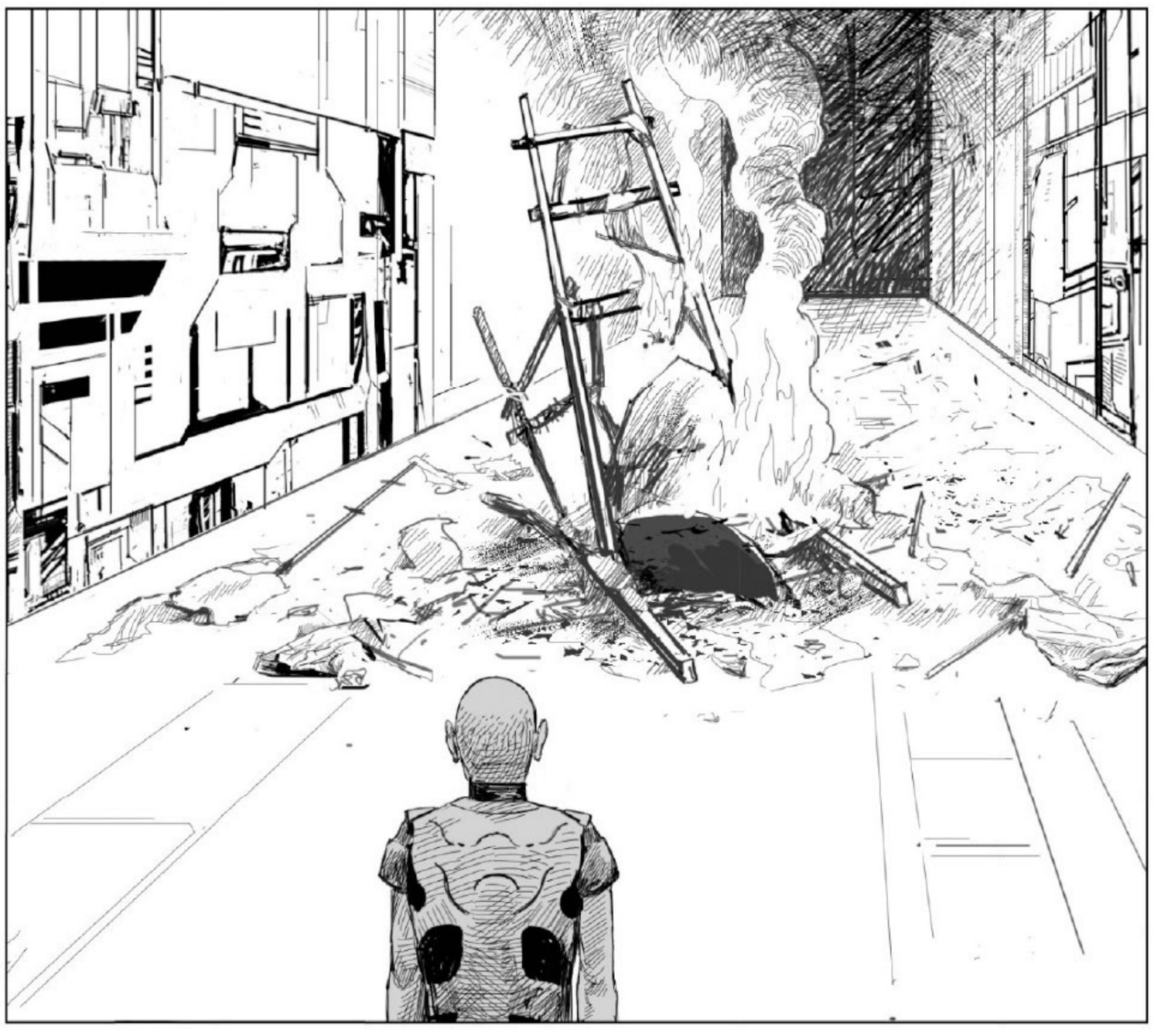
OH, THEY'RE GREAT GODS, THEY ARE! HIDING IN THEIR LAIR LIKE THE COWARDS THEY ARE!

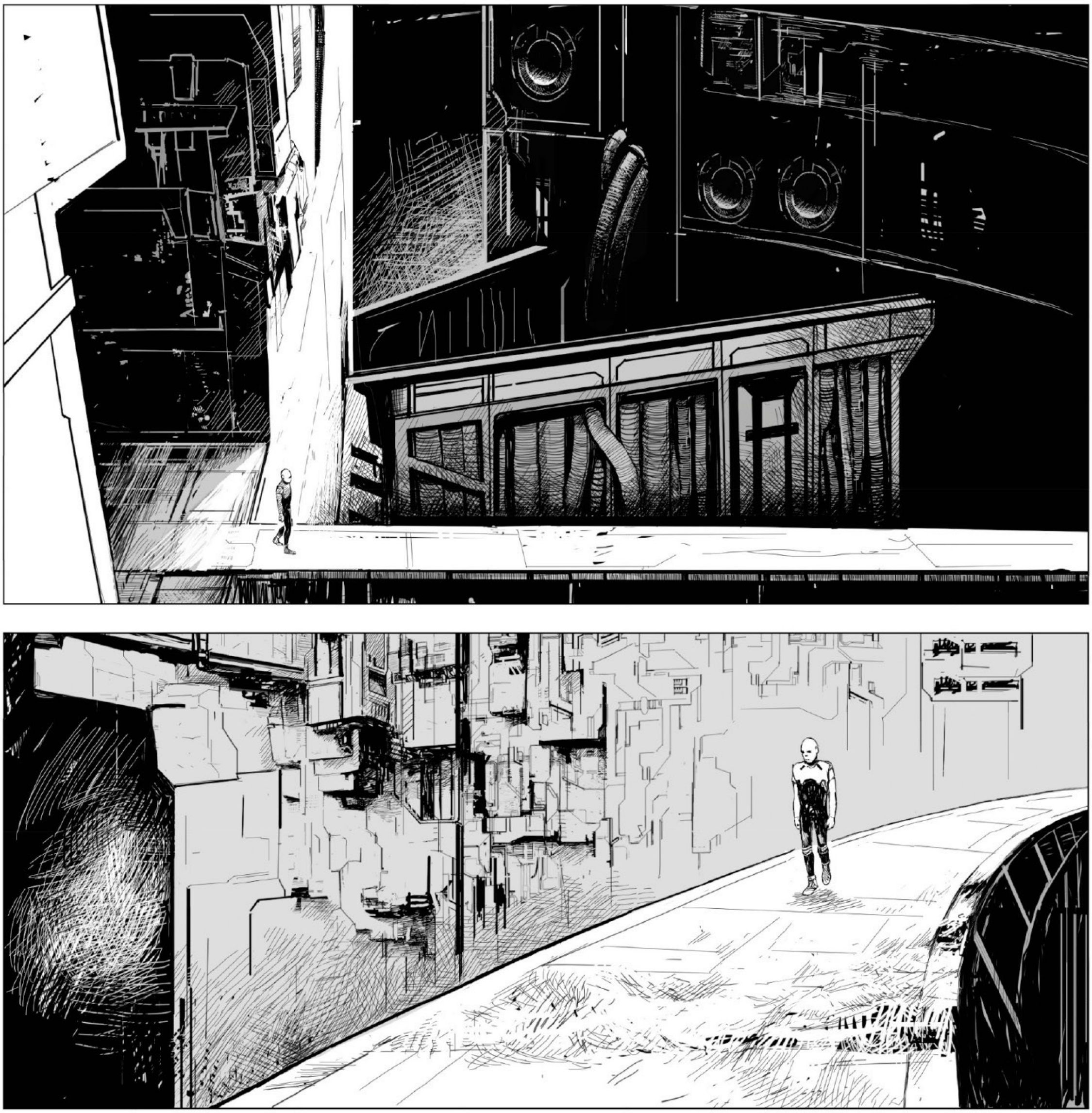
BUT DON'T YOU WORRY, THEY HAVE GREAT PLANS FOR YOU! THEY'LL TURN YOU INTO CLEANERS WHEN THEY GET THE CHANCE!
TO CLEAN UP THEIR OWN MESSES!

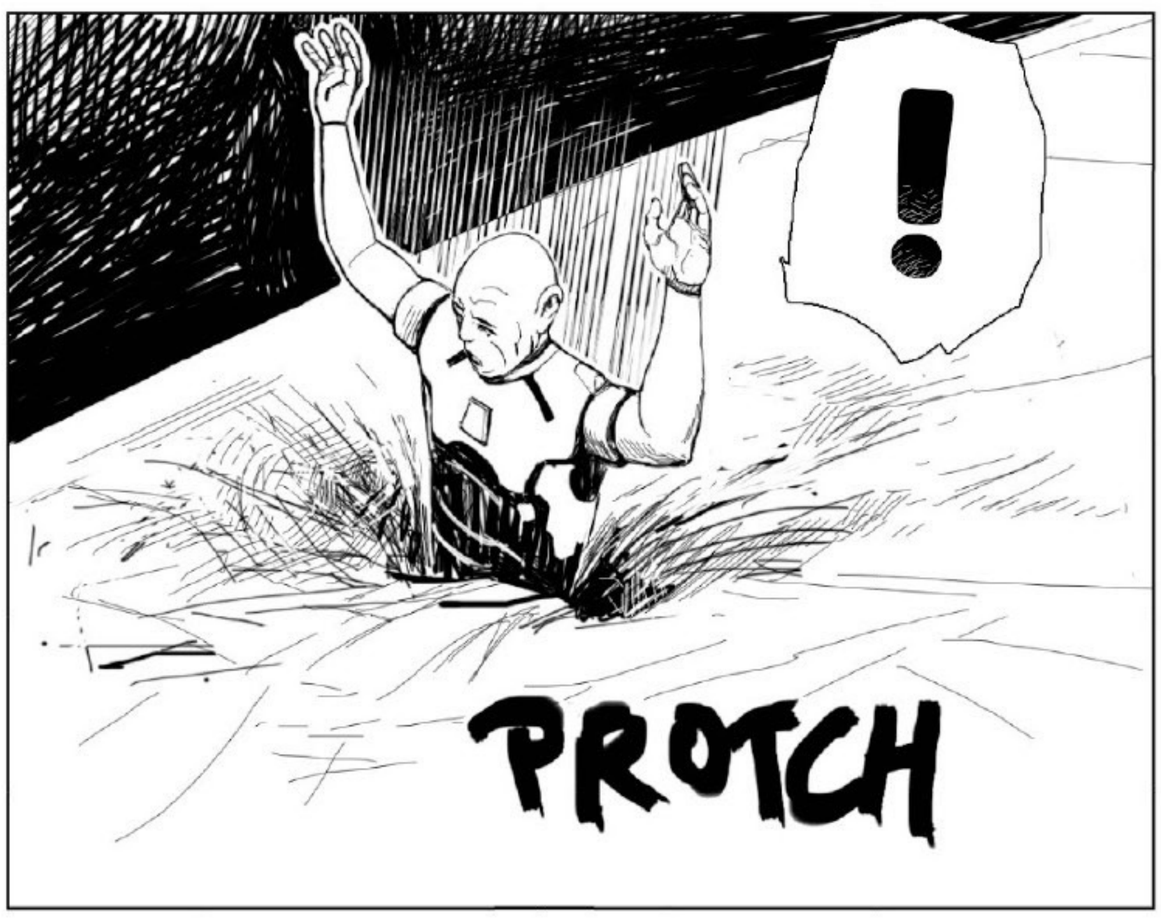



YEAH, SURE, THAT'S RIGHT! RUN! RUN TO SHELTER!

BUT THERE IS NO SHELTER!
WE'RE ALL TRAPPED ON THIS DAMN SHIP!






PROTCH

HUH...
WHAT...?

NO!

GET AWAY, MONSTER!

TAP

TAP

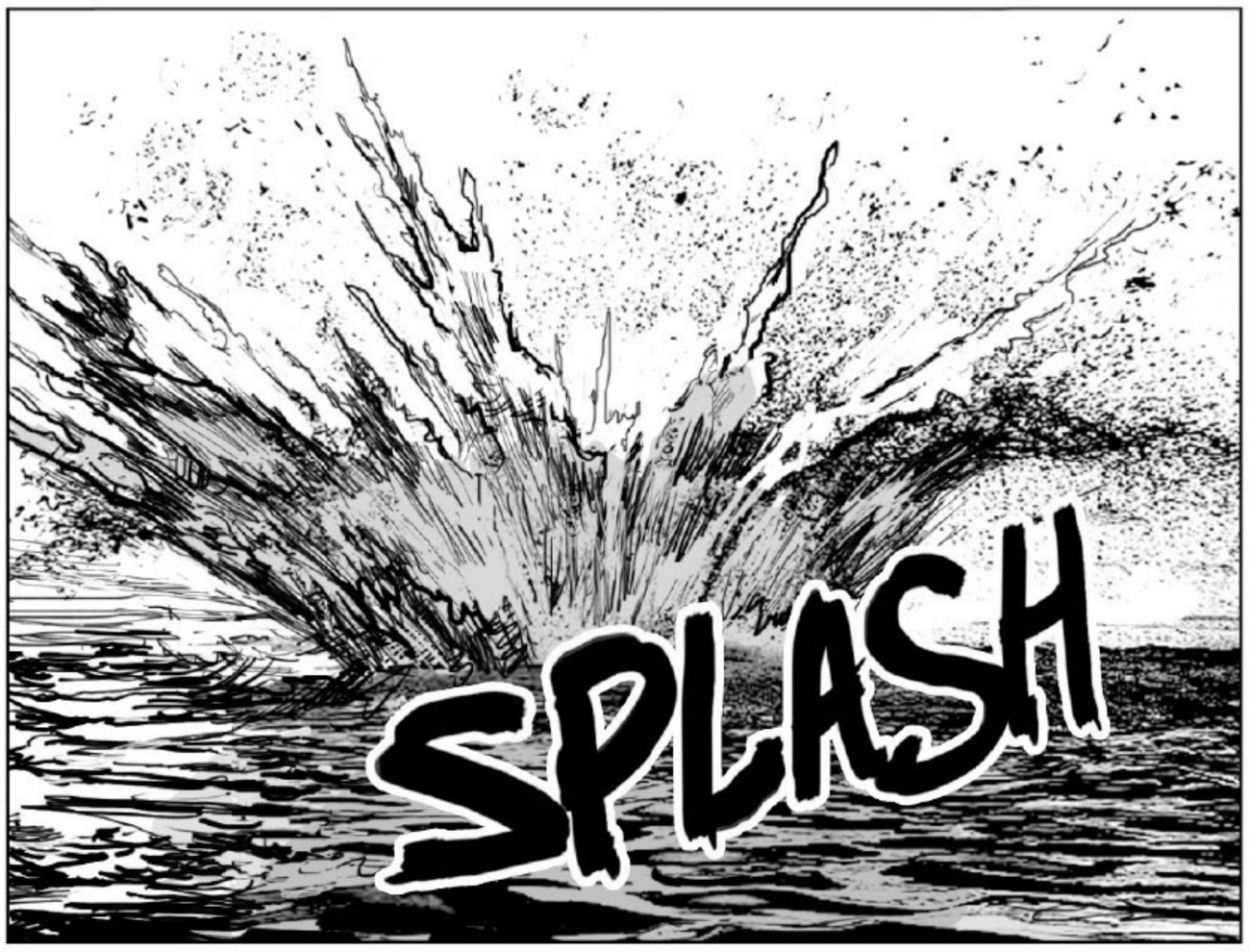
I SAID GET AWAY!

!?

CRAAAC

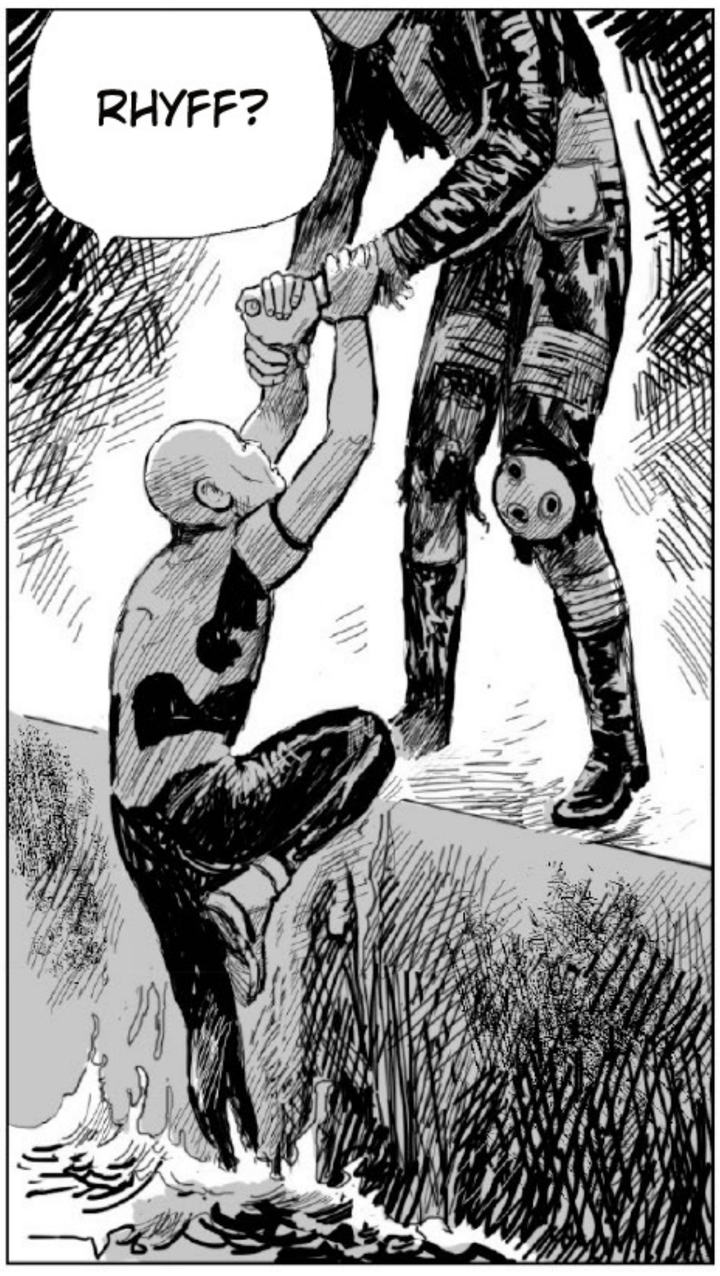
WHAT?
AAAHHH!

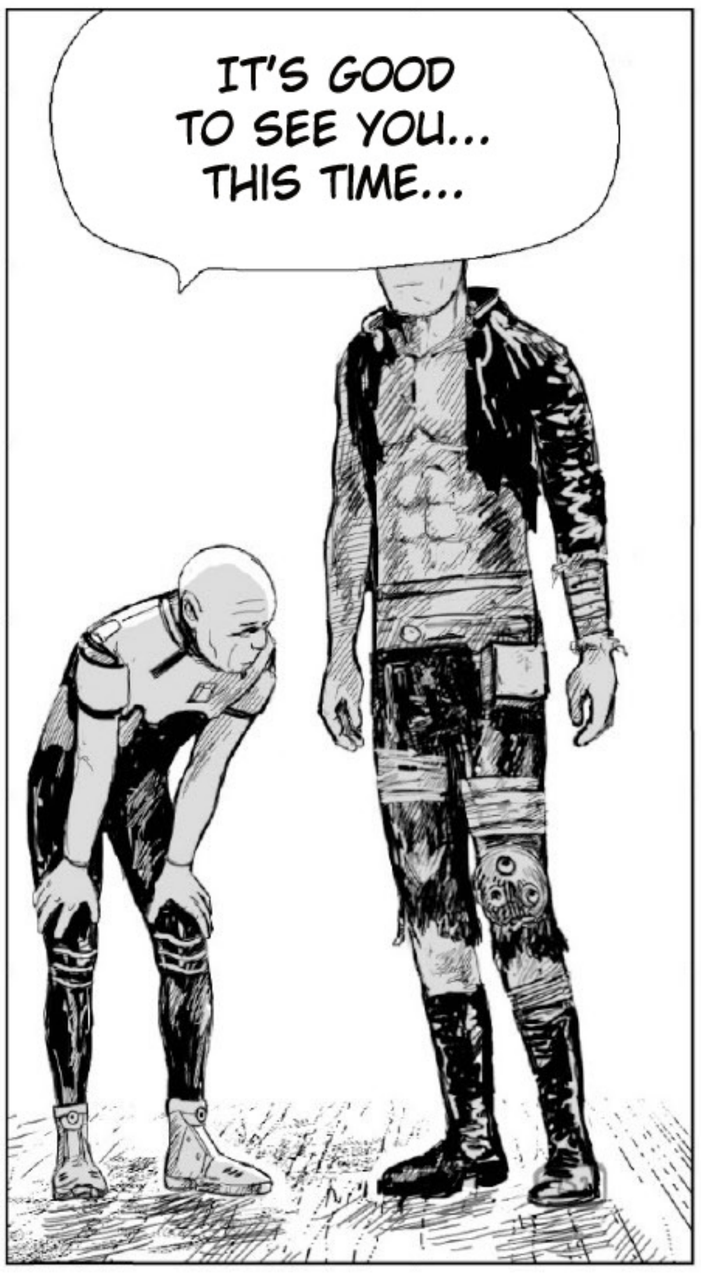
AAAH


SPLASH

AAAARGH, THAT'S DISGUSTING!
CLAP
PLAF

OVER HERE!


RHYFF?


IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU... THIS TIME...

WHAT HAPPENED WITH THE STUFF YOU WERE GONNA DO?

YEAH...

POG

WHEN I SAID I HAD TO CHECK SOMETHING...

I FELT LIKE SOMEONE WAS FOLLOWING US... A SHADOW, A PRESENCE...

I SEARCHED FOR A WHILE, BUT I DIDN'T FIND ANYTHING... BUT I DON'T THINK IT'S A PROBLEM...

NO, IT'S NOT A PROBLEM...

IT'S NOT A PROBLEM BECAUSE APPARENTLY HE'S FOUND US...

!?

HEY, YOU!

WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM US ANYWAY?

I SAID...

FWOOOSH

SHIT, THAT STINGS, YOU BASTARD!

KRAAK

HOW'S THIS? DOES THAT STING?

...

CHTING

RHAAAA

UMPF

AAARGH, HOW MANY ARMS DO YOU HAVE, YOU SHIT?

I DON'T KNOW IF I CAN BEAT HIM, LUPO! GO!

LUPO!

GO, DAMN IT! WHAT THE HELL'S YOUR PROBLEM?

MY... PROBLEM?

ANYONE CAN GO THROUGH THE TORANAS... THERE'S NO NEED FOR ANY SPECIAL COMPONENT.

IN FORTY YEARS OF EXPLORING THIS DAMN SHIP...

... I'VE NEVER BROKEN A SINGLE BONE...

WHEREVER YOU ARE, I FEEL IT... AND WHEN YOU'RE REALLY CLOSE...

... IT BURNS ME. IT MAKES ME WANT TO MAKE YOU GO AWAY...

EVERY TIME I'VE RUN INTO THE CZARNS...

... THEY'VE TRIED TO KILL ME, NOT CONTAMINATE ME.

YOU GOTTA BE ONE OR THE OTHER TO SURVIVE IN THERE...

THERE A PROBLEM, LIL SIS?

YOU SEEM TO BE IN MUCH BETTER SHAPE THAN ANY OTHER MAN AMONG US...

!?

I SAID GET AWAY!

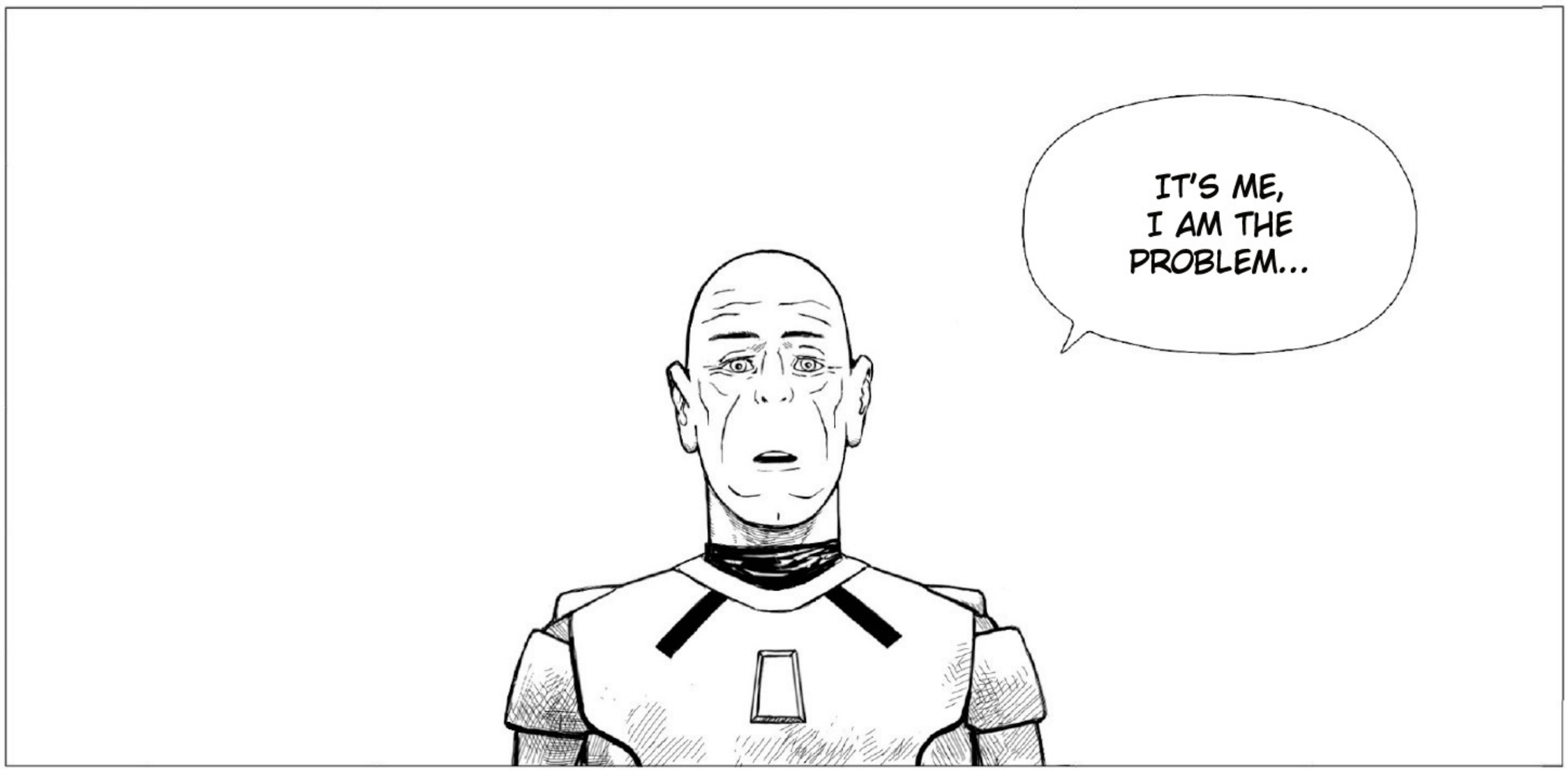
BUT KNOWING THAT THE SHADOWS AND I HAVE A COMMON GOAL...

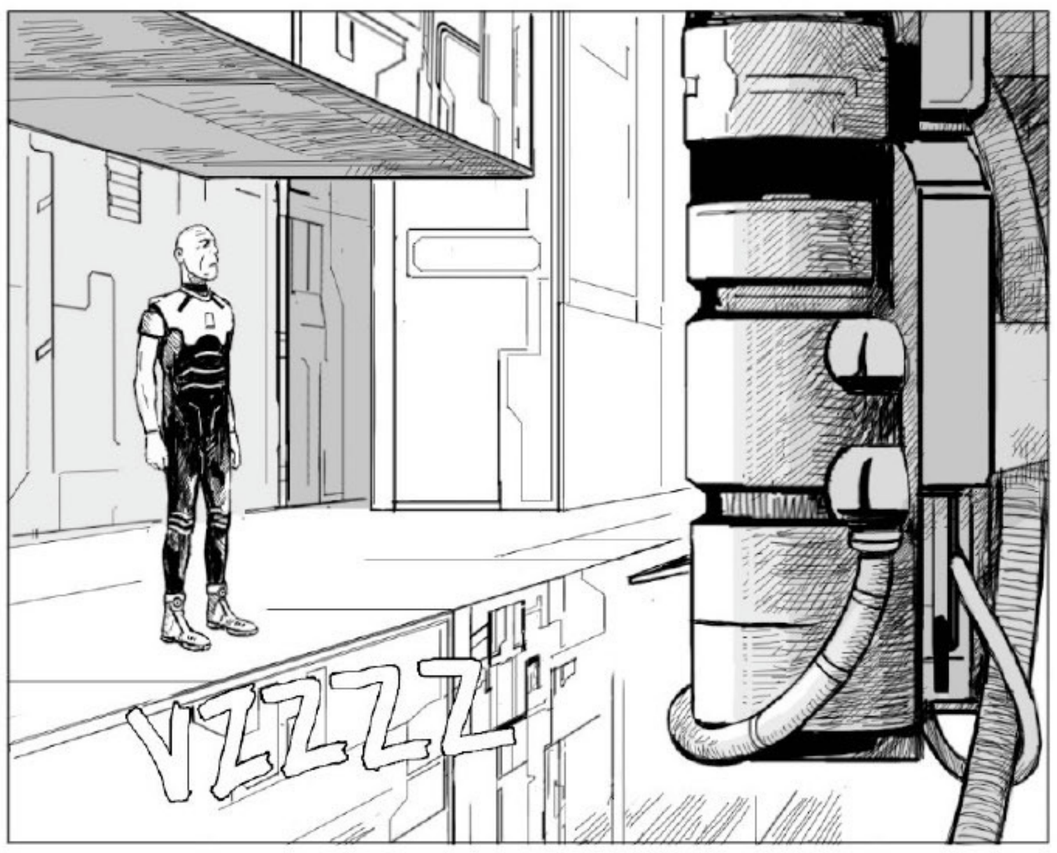
... DOESN'T FILL ME WITH JOY.

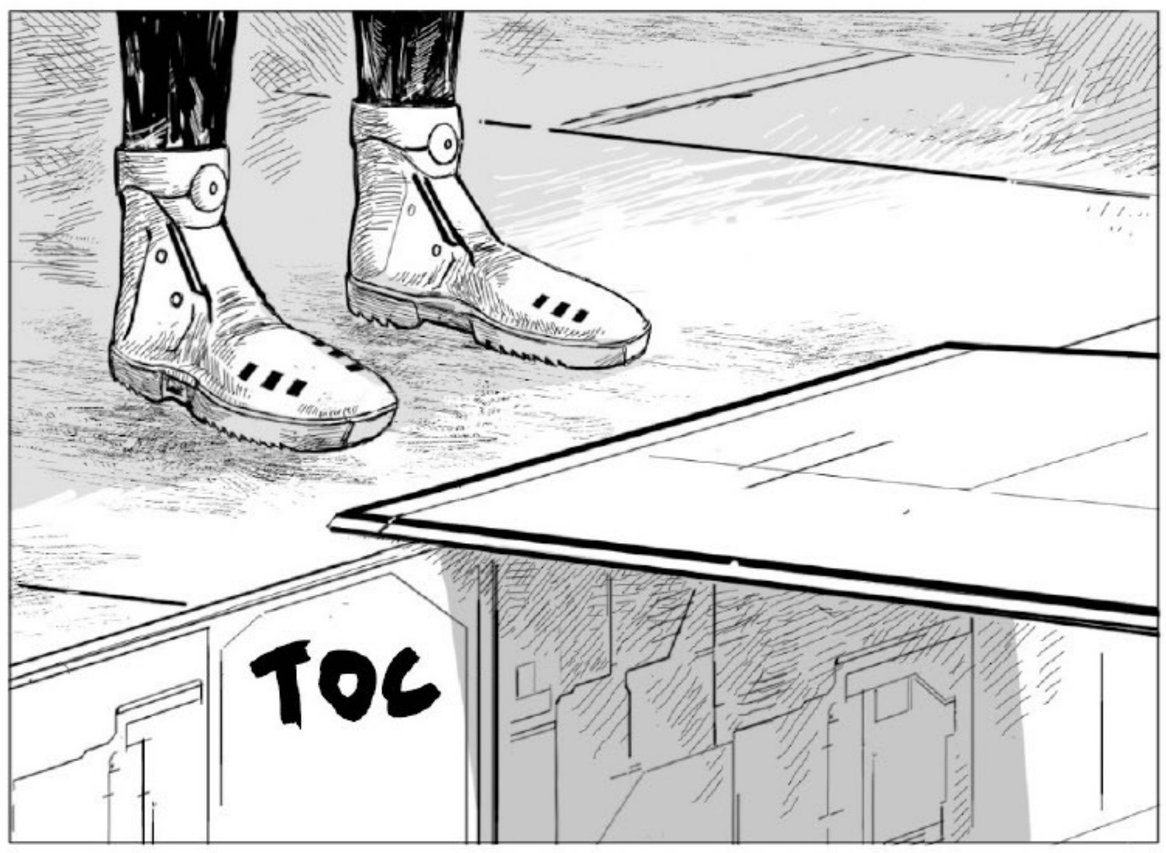
SHE DIDN'T WANT TO COME...

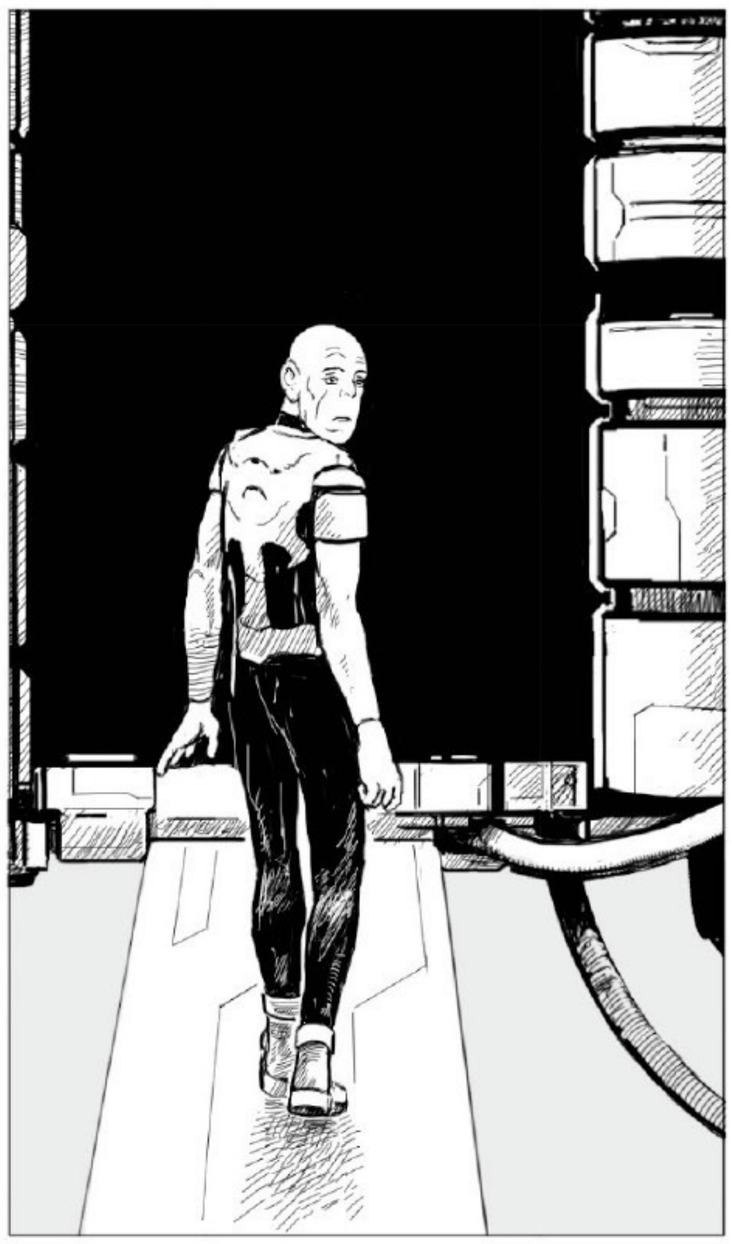
SHE'S SCARED OF YOU...

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE, MY FRIEND?

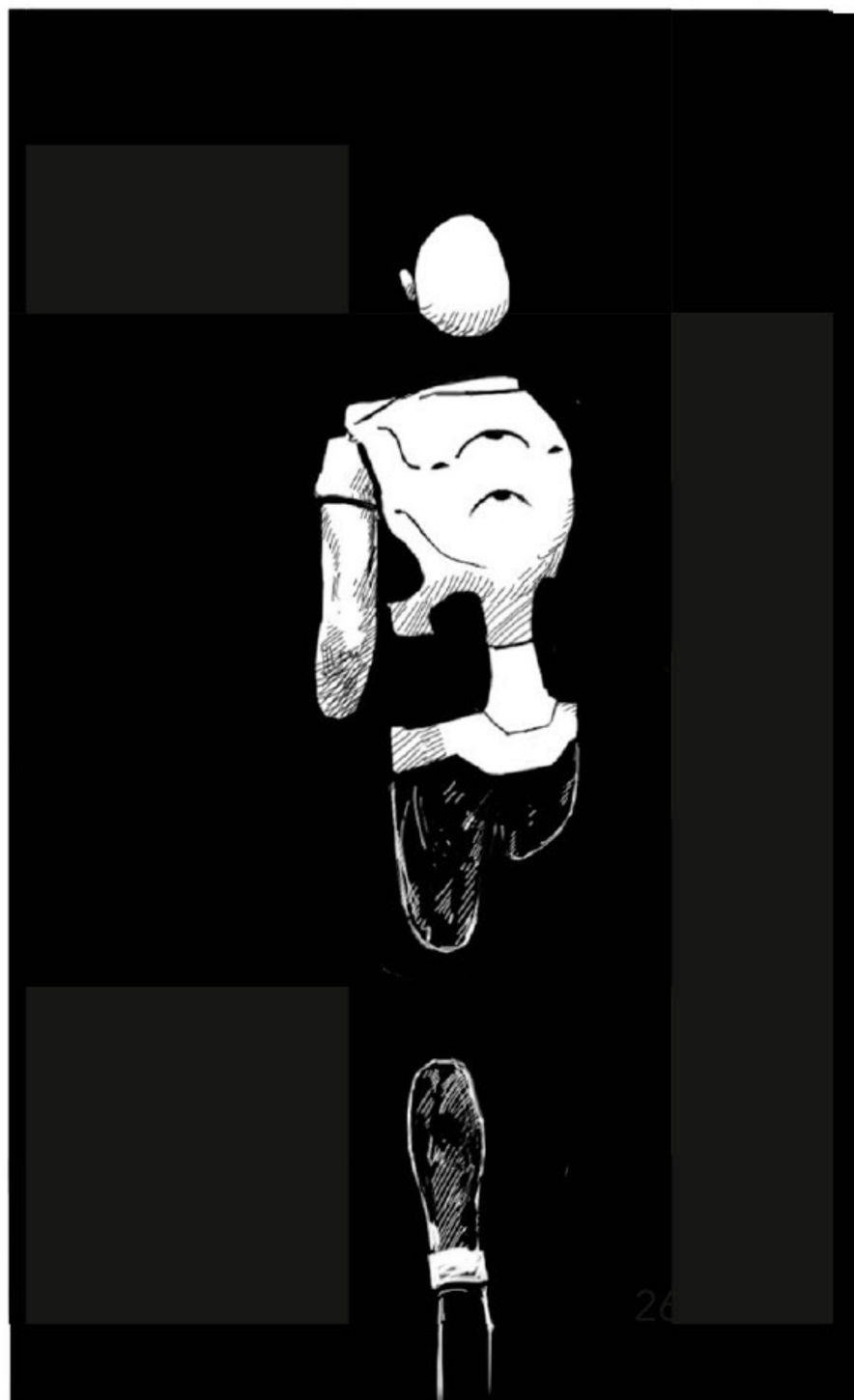

IT'S ME,
I AM THE
PROBLEM...

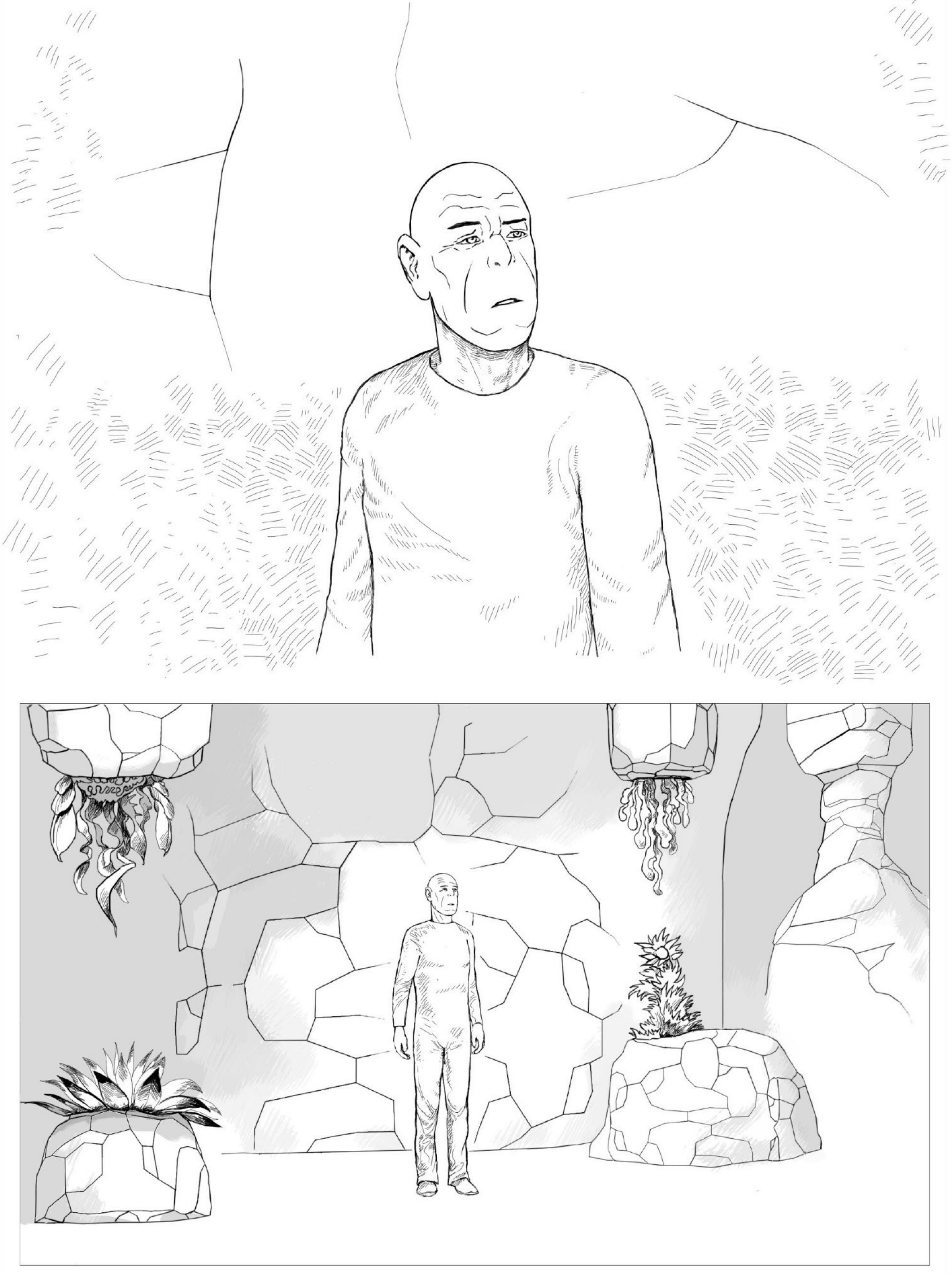

VZZZZZ


TOC



GO, LITTLE MAN!
GO, AND TELL ME
EVERYTHING!





HELLO LUPO. IS MY APPEARANCE AGREEABLE TO YOU?

I READ IN YOUR MEMORIES THAT YOU LIKED THIS PERSON A GREAT DEAL WHEN SHE WAS A CHILD. I THOUGHT IT WOULD HELP YOU RELAX.

ERM... COULD I SEE WHAT YOU REALLY LOOK LIKE?

WHAT I REALLY LOOK LIKE? THAT IS AN AMUSING CONCEPT... LET ME SEE...

WHAT DO YOU THINK TO THIS?

YOU'RE AN OED?

NO, I AM THE AI THAT RUNS THIS SHIP. I HAVE NO REAL PHYSICAL FORM.

BEFORE WE GO ANY FURTHER, I NEED TO KNOW: WHEN YOU SAID "I AM THE PROBLEM", WHAT DID YOU MEAN, LUPO?

I AM CONTAMINATED.

CORRECT, YOU ARE.

HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN?

COME ON, YOU KNOW THAT. THINK.

WHEN I BROUGHT JENNA BACK.

...

THAT WAS THE REASON FOR THE TORANA? YOU PUT THE AREA IN QUARANTINE?

YES. AND YOU FOUND YOURSELF ON THE OTHER SIDE ACCIDENTALLY. I'M SORRY.

PORO AND JENNA... ARE THEY DEAD?

YES, LUPO. THEY'VE BEEN DEAD FOR FORTY YEARS.

BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND: IF JENNA WAS CONTAMINATED, AND SHE CONTAMINATED US TOO...

... WHY DIDN'T WE BECOME SHADOWS? THAT'S WHAT THE ION MUD DOES, RIGHT?

WE DON'T KNOW... A DIFFERENT STRATEGY? A MUTANT STRAIN?

IT REMAINED DORMANT, HIDING - INCLUDING FROM YOU - BIDING ITS TIME.

IT WAS INSIDE ME ALL THIS TIME?

CONTAGIOUS?

EXTREMELY CONTAGIOUS. YOU WERE IN CONTROL FOR MOST OF THE TIME...

BUT SOMETIMES IT MANIFESTED... AND YOU DIDN'T EVEN REALISE IT.

IT EVEN MANAGED TO MODIFY YOUR THOUGHTS, TO A CERTAIN DEGREE...

YOUR STUBBORNNESS, YOUR MENTAL BLOCKS... CERTAIN MEMORIES TOO... THEY WERE ITS WORK...

YOU WANTED TO GO THROUGH THE TORANAS, AND THAT WAS WHAT IT WANTED TOO...

BUT TO DO THAT, YOU HAD TO BE IGNORANT OF ITS EXISTENCE...

YOU WERE ITS TROJAN HORSE.

BUT WHY?

TO ESCAPE! IT KNEW IT WAS TRAPPED IN THIS SHIP. LIKE YOU.

THE IRONY IS THAT YOU COULD ONLY GO THROUGH A TORANA IF YOU WERE AWARE OF ITS EXISTENCE...

... RENDERING IT POWERLESS.

THE IRONY RUNS EVEN DEEPER THAN THAT! YOU CALLED YOUR PROJECT 'JANUS', THE ROMAN GOD OF DOORS...

BUT THERE IS ANOTHER ASPECT TO THAT DEITY: JANUS BIFRONS...

... REPRESENTED WITH TWO FACES...

...

WHAT IS THE ION MUD?

WE DON'T KNOW EXACTLY. AT ITS ORIGIN LIES AN ATOM, SKOTADIUM, WHICH THE OEDS DISCOVERED IN A DISTANT GALAXY.

AN INCREDIBLE ATOM, CAPABLE OF SHAPE MEMORY, AMONG OTHER THINGS...

THE TECHNOLOGICAL APPLICATIONS WERE IMMENSE. THEY USED IT EXTENSIVELY, INCLUDING IN THIS VERY SHIP...

BUT IT SEEMED TO HAVE A LIFE OF ITS OWN.

SOMEHOW, WE STILL DON'T KNOW HOW, IT MANAGED TO BOND WITH OTHER ATOMS...

... CREATING SIMPLE, AND THEN MORE COMPLEX LIFEFORMS.

WHEN IT WORKED OUT HOW TO CONTAMINATE OTHER SPECIES, IT PROLIFERATED, IT SPREAD LIKE WILDFIRE...

SO THE SHADOWS ARE MADE OF THE SAME... "MATERIAL" AS THE TECHNOLOGY USED IN THE SHIP?

ISN'T THAT A PROBLEM?

YES, OF COURSE! BUT THEY DON'T SEEM TO BE ABLE TO DO MUCH...

YOUR STRAIN, HOWEVER...

WHEN I THOUGHT PORO WAS GIVING ME A HELPING HAND...

IT WAS YOUR MUD, YES.

TO BE ON THE SAFE SIDE, WE PROTECTED THE MOST SENSITIVE AREAS WITH A QUARANTINE...

... AND DEACTIVATED THE VITAL MACHINERY USING THE TECHNOLOGY...

DID YOU TAKE IT OUT OF ME?

YES.

CAN I SEE IT?

OF COURSE! FOLLOW ME.

IS IT STILL DANGEROUS?

NO.

IN ITS NATIVE GALAXY, SKOTADIUM IS NATURALLY FOUND BOUND TO ANOTHER ATOM, WHICH RENDERS IT INERT.

?

WE USED THAT ATOM TO CREATE A MATERIAL IMMUNE TO THE MUD: THE ION SHELL. ITS CONFINEMENT CELL IS ENTIRELY MADE OF ION SHELL.

THE NOMADS, THAT WAS YOU?

YES. THE ION MUD IS JUST A MATERIAL, BUT IT BECAME A LIFEFORM... WE TRIED TO DO THE SAME WITH THE ION SHELL, TO COMBAT IT.

OUR LATEST SPECIMENS HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL...

THROUGH GENETIC ENGINEERING?

YES. LUCKILY, THIS SHIP HAS A HUGE GENETIC LIBRARY.

THE COMBINATIONS WERE ALMOST INFINITE, BUT WE FOUND IT EVENTUALLY. AFTER ALL, THIS IS A SCIENTIFIC MISSION...

AND THE OEDS ARE GREAT SCIENTISTS...

YOU CALL THIS A SCIENTIFIC MISSION?

TAKING LIFE FORMS FROM ALL OVER THE UNIVERSE...

... AND STICKING THEM IN VATS?

IT'S NOT SO DIFFERENT FROM THE NATURALIST EXPLORERS OF YOUR 16TH CENTURY...

... WHO CAME BACK TO EUROPE WITH THEIR HULLS CRAMMED FULL OF EXOTIC PLANTS AND ANIMALS...

BUT AT LEAST THEY SHOWED A LITTLE BIT OF CONSIDERATION FOR THEIR CARGO...

I SENSE ANGER IN YOUR VOICE... AND I THINK I UNDERSTAND...

IT'S A PROBLEM OF PERSPECTIVE...

THE OEDS ARE ON ANOTHER LEVEL...

YOU SEE, THEY HAVEN'T EVEN NOTICED YET THAT YOU HUMANS...

... ARE AN INTELLIGENT SPECIES...

LET ME MEET THEM...

... AND I'LL TELL THEM WE'RE INTELLIGENT...

... AMONG OTHER THINGS...

I FEAR THAT WILL NOT BE POSSIBLE, LUPO.

THEY ARE... INDISPOSED!

AH, HERE WE ARE!

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO IT?

WILL YOU KILL IT?

NO. THE OEDS BELIEVE IT DESERVES TO LIVE.

WHEN THE CONTAMINATION IS CONTAINED, WE WILL LET IT GO, IT WILL BE SET FREE IN A REMOTE GALAXY... UNDER SURVEILLANCE.

WELL GREAT! AFTER ALL, WHAT COULD GO WRONG?

IN ANY CASE, YOU DID IT, GENIUS!

I DID NOT EXPECT IT TO REACT TO YOUR PRESENCE.

WHY NOT?

...

I'M DEAD, AREN'T I?

YES. WE MANAGED TO REMOVE IT, BUT IT WAS A DELICATE OPERATION... WE'RE MAINTAINING YOUR BODY ARTIFICIALLY.

I AM DIRECTLY ADDRESSING YOUR BRAIN THROUGH... AN INTERFACE.

ALL OF THIS IS A SIMULATION.

NOW, THE CHOICE IS YOURS, LUPO: WE CAN MAKE YOU AN ENTIRELY ARTIFICIAL BODY.

THE TECHNOLOGY EXISTS: WE USE IT FOR CERTAIN DRONES.

TO GO WHERE? EARTH?

...

THE EARTH IS... DIFFERENT.

NO BETTER OR WORSE THAN BEFORE, TO BE HONEST...

OR YOU CAN STAY IN THIS SIMULATION FOR HOWEVER LONG YOU LIKE...

PFF...

TALK ABOUT AN EASY DECISION!

WELL, YOU SURE TOOK YOUR TIME...

I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU!

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